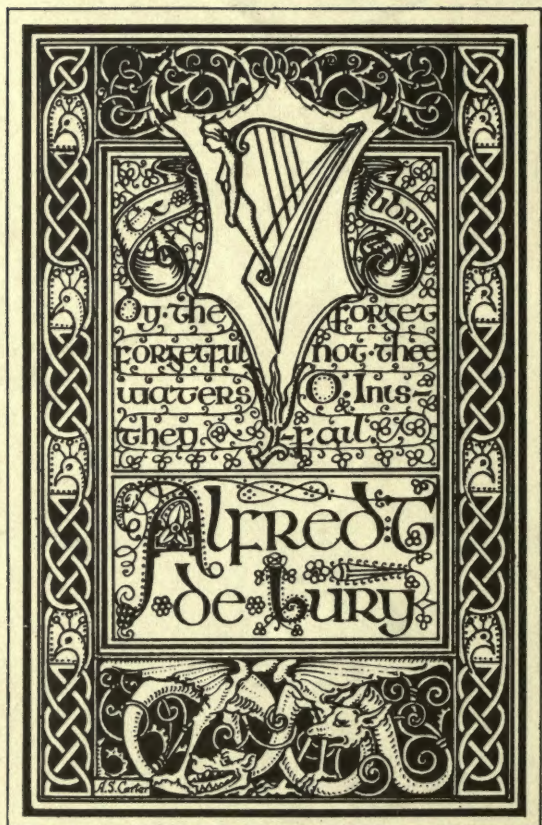





MY OWN PAST
MAUDE M. C. FFOULKES





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MY OWN PAST



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Maude Foulkes

MY OWN PAST ?

By MAUDE M. C. FFOULKES

Joint Author of "My Recollections" (Countess of Cardigan), "My Own Story" (The Ex-Crown Princess of Saxony), "Things I Can Tell" (Lord Rossmore), "My Past" (Countess Marie Larisch)

"A day, an hour of virtuous liberty
Is worth a whole eternity in bondage"

ADDISON

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“I dedicate all this to You”

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MY OWN PAST

CHAPTER I

EARLY MEMORIES

MY earliest recollection in a more or less impressionist career is of one February morning in 1876, when my grandmother's maid tied up my curls with a black ribbon, and looked preternaturally solemn as she did so. "Where's my blue bow?" I asked. "You won't be able to wear it, Miss Maude," she replied. "Your Papa's dead."

I looked at her. Death conveyed absolutely no meaning to me: the comfortable kitchen was unchanged since yesterday, the early stillness of a well-ordered household pervaded the home on this, as on every previous morning; the only sign of the unusual was the black ribbon bow.

I crept down the passage which led to the hall, and then, for the first time, I became conscious of a Sabbath gloom which hung over everything. I peeped into the dining-room, but although the blinds were drawn, I could hear the traffic passing and repassing with a frequency that dissipated any idea of the descent of an extra Day of Rest upon us. Baffled, I crossed the hall, and opened the library door in search of adventure. But in here a dreadful kind of stillness which I did not understand overpowered me. Silence and darkness, the two great enemies of childhood, occupied the room;

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and it was very cold, far colder than the wintry air outside. As my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness I began to discern the outlines of the friendly furniture to which I was accustomed: the tall mahogany book-case was there to give me confidence, the table in the window where the Family Bible reposed on a green wool mat was undisturbed, all seemed outwardly as usual, but there *was* a difference. I was aware of a faint uneasiness almost of fear. My nerves shivered slightly. I advanced boldly, and as I did so I came in contact with something long and black which stood on trestles in the middle of the room—and I at once knew that this austere box represented the difference in our everyday life. I think I must have bruised my bare arm against it, for I began to whimper, and my sobs increased with a sense of inward grievance against the unexpected. Two things only mattered, a stiff black bow held my hair in the iron grip of newness, and—Papa was dead.

And thus I first encountered Death, and my frightened tears fell on what I afterwards knew to be my father's coffin.

I remember someone coming in search of me, and finding me too scared and withal too fascinated to move; and I remember, as the morning advanced, that I was again taken into the room of silence and lifted up to see the coffin. But I shrieked because I was beginning to understand, and also because the Jersey undertaker, possessed of a sinister imagination, had embossed the figure of a black angel upon the lid. This completed the ascendancy of the first terror, for in my short life I had never dreamt of the possibility of a black angel. I had hitherto understood the heavenly visitants to be white and comfortable beings,

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whose wings, neat and complete, encircled little girls at bedtime and helped to make their dreams a credit to their prayers. But a black angel—could anything so fearsome exist?—and then the idea seized me that God had decreed my light-hearted father should become one, and I shrieked again at the ghastly possibility.

“What a naughty little girl you are, Topsy,” said a plaintive voice; I smelt the perfume which always followed in my mother’s wake, and I knew that this enigmatic lady must have arrived when I was asleep, for I certainly had not bidden her good night on the previous evening. “Look,” she continued, “there’s a pretty wreath—the hotel-keeper’s child at St. Helier sent it to poor Papa; *she* didn’t make a noise like you. Oh, *do* be good,” continued Mamma; “do,” she added, appealing to my self-contained family who stood about in a helpless group, “take this child away.”

So I was sent to the warm and hospitable kitchen, where I heard snatches of gossip about “Mr. William.” He had “died quite sudden-like, just after he got into bed.” “A dreadful rough crossing from Jersey to Weymouth.” “Mrs. William all alone.” “So they opened the coffin at the Customs, did they—the wretches! Well, nobody wanted to smuggle. A great blow to the master—his only son.” And thus they talked, to the accompaniment of the creak of the ever-turning jack, and the spluttering of the meat roasting in front of the big clear fire, since the presence of Death has rarely yet been able to change the luncheon hour.

The same afternoon Aunt Mary (whose handsome sables always silently reminded the family of her prosperous marriage) drove us to the cemetery where grave-digging was in progress, and I experienced a fresh

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thrill when I looked into the ever-deepening hole which would presently obliterate Papa. The wet wind from the sea fell on my face like unseen tears; perhaps the spirit of the dead man could see the hard road which his child was destined to tread after he had become a dim memory, and thus gave her "Greeting and Farewell." I like to think that my father would have understood me had he lived, I like to believe that he would have loved me, and protected me. I have never suffered disillusion over him, so what happier memory can I possess?

After the funeral my mother went back to London and left me with my grandparents. She and I were on terms of polite friendship, but not affection—our attitude towards each other was perfect in its propriety, but, in my mother's opinion, a child was not necessary to make happiness; marriage had thrust me upon her, and she resented it. I think she was one of the most interesting psychological problems I have ever encountered, and in those days she was wholly lacking in any kind of emotion.

I remember her as a graceful woman, with well-coiffured golden hair (the colour an object of deep suspicion to my family), beautiful grey eyes, and delicate features. She looked appealing, and she appealed to men, as do most women of the apparently helpless type, while yet she possessed an inexhaustible fund of obstinacy with which it seemed impossible to credit her. She never talked much, and she usually gained her own way by silent methods undetected by the casual observer. My mother was granite—when she had once determined upon a thing—but she looked as if she was always ready to agree with anybody.

She dressed exquisitely, and during her widowhood

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she was hung with the chains of jet which were then fashionable, perhaps with the notion that they symbolised convention's shackles in memory of the dead, to be presently struck off by the hands of a second husband. Mamma affected delicate colours, clinging perfumes, and old lace, and she invariably wore a cluster of artificial violets—another offence to the family, as being most “unusual”—the greatest crime of all in their eyes.

Why my mother married my father must remain for ever a mystery. She was an orphan ward in Chancery, and by way of being an heiress when she first met my aunts at school. The acquaintance ripened into friendship, the strange soulless girl became a constant visitor at their home, and she and my father were mutually attracted by the lure which “opposites” usually possess, but she never understood him or appreciated him. He was clever, high-spirited, generous to a fault, and he was making a large income as a civil engineer at a time when most young men are still at college.

For some unknown reason he persuaded my mother to embark upon the unnecessary adventure of a secret marriage, which my grandmother never forgave, and for which deceit Mamma alone was credited—wrongfully, I am assured. She was one of those women who think that love and marriage are slightly indecent, and only attain the seal of respectability through the orthodox public wedding, the comfort of bridal hymns, and a fine muster of gifts. These alone, to her type, legalise those after-transportations about which poets sing, but which are never mentioned by proper-minded people.

When I recall the days of my childhood, I realise

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what a strange upbringing mine must have been, for my father's family were people who lived by rule, and who never deviated from the laws of life as laid down on old-fashioned lines.

It is a far cry from Yorkshire to Brighton, but soon after their marriage my grandparents migrated, lock, stock and barrel, from north to south. My grandfather, John Chester Craven, was one of the earliest pioneers of the railway, a friend of Robert Stephenson, and he had served his apprenticeship in the hard school of those days. He was a typical Yorkshire product, a keen business man, wrapped up in his life's work of railways and engines, clever in a brilliant mechanical manner, but a straight-living being, with a nature as rugged as the county which gave him birth. His name has always been associated with the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway, and at one time my grandparents occupied the long suite of rooms which overlooks the chief platform of the Brighton terminus. Later they removed to St. Peter's House, a large corner residence facing St. Peter's Church, and it is there that my happiest memories begin.

It was a tall house with many inquisitive windows, a garden filled with the usual well-trimmed laurels and guarded by a sentinel poplar. Looking at this solitary tree, set in the uninteresting garden, I used to weave strange fancies concerning it. I regarded it in winter as a kind of giant broom which swept the frozen snow from the skies, but in the spring and summer it became a living creature, a trembling prisoner encompassed by a wall, who longed for the freedom of some country road bordered with its fellows. When the fierce autumn gales tried to snap its swaying slenderness, I thought the whirling leaves were despairing messages

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which it sent through the disturbed air to some sympathetic poplar in the distant solitudes of woods and groves, and I felt sorry for the captive tree.

“How foolish not to fall down and smash up the horrid wall,” I told it. But the poplar only shivered mournfully. “I cannot escape, I shall die here. Little girl, you are going to be a prisoner too, but, unlike me, you will find the way to freedom.”

I sometimes told my grandmother about my thoughts, for I was very lonely, and she was one of those delightful people who understand a child and who never bother it with useless and, to a child, “foolish” questions. She was a large woman, with a handsome face and noble carriage which set her far above the prettier members of her sex. My grandmother was a Miss Jefferson who came from an old Quaker family, and one of her aunts was known for miles round Beverley as “The beautiful Quakeress.” It must have been, I fancy, from the Cravens that I have inherited the qualities which have not made me a temperamental success, as among the entries in an old eighteenth century Prayer Book there is a record of a certain Mary Craven who was many times reprimanded by angry members of the family for her undisciplined ways and love of worldly vanities. I have always been amused by the long-dead Mary’s moral maxims, and I have always longed to possess the book which contains them.

There is no doubt that I became a dreamer of dreams at an early age. One word sang always in my heart as an imprisoned bird sings in its cage. As yet I hardly realised the word was Freedom—freedom and escape.

I had one room given over to me, and I chose it

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because of an old engraving of Mary Queen of Scots which hung there neglected and alone. The family taste for art was essentially Early Victorian, and ran to Landseer engravings, "The Trial of Queen Caroline" in the library, expensive seascapes in the dining-room, and chaste water-colours in the drawing-room. Poor Mary Queen of Scots in her satinwood frame was not then fashionable, but I loved her, and spent hours admiring the presentment of the unfortunate Queen gazing upwards at her barred windows on the morning of her execution. Another friend of my childhood was a tiny wax Cupid who lay smiling on a bed of tinsel leaves and wool flowers under a glass case in Grandmamma's room. I always wanted to play with the little creature and see of what material its wings were made, but, perhaps luckily for Cupid, I was only allowed to look and not to touch. The waxen Love is undisturbed to-day, like everything else that I remember as a child in the old home. It is only the little girl who has changed.

Grandmamma brought up her three daughters to be practical women. Eliza, the eldest, was a beautiful girl, and I remember her as a handsome woman with deep blue eyes and a sylph-like slenderness which she has never lost. She was my grandfather's right hand, for she managed all his business affairs, acted as his secretary, and refused many offers of marriage solely on his account. My Aunt Mary was dignified, and filled with the satisfaction of having made two absolutely prosperous marriages. Her carriages, her furs, her house and herself were irreproachable, and she looked and dressed the part of a Mayoress of Brighton to perfection. Every birthday her husband presented her with a jewelled Sèvres plate to mark the flight of

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another well-ordered year, and I have since marvelled at the contented mind which never craved for anything more satisfying or more original.

Sabina, the youngest, whose name I always confused with the charming water fairy of Milton's verse, married a Bradford manufacturer, and my cousins were nice children, luckily for themselves utterly unlike the strange little cuckoo who was known as "Mr. William's daughter."

White, my grandmother's maid, had sole and undisputed charge of me, but she tempered justice with mercy, and used to tell me most thrilling stories when I was allowed, as a great treat, to have tea with her in the kitchen. She was a little apple-cheeked woman with bright black eyes and a Sussex accent strong enough to betray her origin anywhere; White was intensely religious, and she worked and washed with a will unknown to many present-day servants, whose apparent aim in life is to emulate the lilies of the field who toil not, neither do they spin.

White had a warm corner in her heart for me; she dressed me in the morning, and bathed me at night in one of the square wooden washing tubs used for the family laundry. She scorned luxuries, and scrubbed out the nooks and corners of my anatomy with the strongest yellow soap until I shone again. It was White who put my straight locks into papers, disguising them as curls, and when she took me upstairs to bed she piloted me safely past the dreadful case of stuffed macaws which terrified me almost as much as did the shark's teeth trophy on the lower landing.

One story of hers which I have never forgotten concerned an old house, near Horsham, where her mother lived. It had, I think, been formerly an inn,

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and was haunted by the report of a gun and by rustlings and steps up and down the staircase. White has often told me how, when her parents were sitting in the kitchen, they plainly heard the report of a gun and the whizz of a bullet, seemingly at very close quarters ; but familiarity in their case bred contempt, and the hauntings soon ceased to trouble the family. The story, however, possessed a curious sequel, for, when the house was pulled down a few years ago, human bones and a good deal of loose money were discovered under the kitchen flooring, which I think points conclusively to a crime having been committed there in the past. This "gun" story was always recounted at tea-time, and I see myself as an awestruck little girl sitting by the fire devouring buttered toast and begging White to tell me some more, whilst the grey parrot endeavoured to disturb the swing of the narrative by fiercely demanding someone "to put the kettle on, and we'll all have tea."

Thus so far my life was peaceful, and there can be no doubt that this period has unconsciously influenced it to a great extent so far as my imagination is concerned. For, being so lonely, I dreamed of happiness and freedom, the great solace of lonely children and all lonely people ; and Richard King, one of the most sympathetic writers we possess, stated an absolute truth when he said, "It is perhaps the lonely young who suffer more acutely—they do not understand. They are full of dreams and of that hope of which dreams are woven." I realised all this when I was a child, and I was, later, to feel the bitterness of another truth as well : that "to the lonely must be granted some recompense surely. They suffer more. . . ."

For I was acutely lonely. There were no children

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at St. Peter's House with whom I could play. As for the grown-ups, I was certainly afraid of Grandpapa, whose study was coldly dominated by plaster busts of the two Stephensons, draped, for some unknown reason, in the togas of Ancient Rome. He allowed me to search the waste-paper basket for envelopes, and sometimes I amused myself with an old dulcimer which I found stowed away, but he rarely took much notice of me. Grandmamma spent many hours in knitting; there was a plethora of wool wherever she sat, and she is always associated in my memory with the making of cuffs, then called muffatees, which glittered with steel beads, and, once knitted, lasted for years. Her favourite seat was an old-fashioned rocking-chair, hardly and brightly upholstered in red velvet, which was somewhat slippery and did not encourage familiarity when I surreptitiously used the chair in the manner of a rocking-horse.

There was nothing individual in St. Peter's House, everything was good and solid, and exactly what might be expected from people in my grandparents' secure status of life. The drawing-room was the essence of accepted good taste, severely conventional both in fittings and furniture. Robert Stephenson (this time in alabaster) was one of the most honoured of the *lares* and *penates*; Canova's "Three Graces" decorated the marble-topped chiffonier, and the modest "Greek Slave" graced a tall what-not. Tropical birds, caged after death in glass cases, relieved the monotony of the alabaster figures; elaborate antimacassars tortured the back and forbade relaxation; the good, expensive furniture was protected by holland covers; nothing ever got broken, or chipped, or scratched, and nothing seemingly ever wore out.

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There were no splashes of colour in china or brocade to gladden the eye; no dainty Chelsea figures who danced gaily through the years to the music of long ago; and it seems strange that, after living in these Early Victorian surroundings, I have still remained a creature whose passionate love for the beautiful is so predominant—no doubt it lay dormant in me all the time.

On Sundays we absolutely radiated goodness. First there was the walk to St. Peter's Church, Grandmamma holding my hand tightly, and impressing upon me the necessity for good behaviour; Grandpapa, as an alderman of Brighton, sat in the Corporation pew (which effectually separated the civic sheep from the civic goats), and we sat behind as his domestic representatives. I usually behaved quite well up to the lengthy sermon, which was preached by Dr. Julius Hannah, and then I felt Grandmamma's fingers seeking mine, and a large lavender lozenge passed into my possession, which I discreetly sucked during the discourse. After church we received the greetings of other worthy families, and then came the early dinner, served on the willow pattern china which was old when I was young. At one time I used to attend the afternoon christenings, until I flagrantly disgraced myself on a never-to-be-forgotten occasion. In those days there was a popular song entitled "The Little Vulgar Boy," and when I heard Dr. Hannah talking about the necessity for the infant to be taught certain things "in the vulgar tongue," I could not restrain myself, and demanded in a voice which carried far, "Is the baby going to be a little vulgar boy, then?"

Sunday afternoons repeated themselves, letter by letter, week by week, year by year. The bookcases

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were always locked, all traces of newspapers and magazines vanished, and the great Family Bible had a field day. Dessert was brought into the library, accompanied by "sherry wine" and a decanter of port, and I can see the green vine-leaf dessert plates as though it were yesterday; Aunt Eliza then ensconced herself in the drawing-room and played "Adeste Fideles" and "Pestal," followed by a selection from the Hymnal. I was beguiled into learning "Sun of my Soul" under the promise of a piano of my own, but Grandpapa did not fulfil his word, and I detested the peaceful hymn in consequence.

Tea was a solemn meal, and I wonder if anyone remembers the cup-plates once in vogue, when people were not ashamed to drink out of their saucers; these were always used at Brighton when I was a child.

I never knew what it meant to be fussed over and loved. Papa was gone for ever, and Mamma was wandering about at her own sweet will. Sometimes she remembered me, and sent a box of expensive, inappropriate books "with fondest love." At other times her spasmodic affection manifested itself in gifts of dolls, dressed most unsuitably for a decorous home. Mamma's tastes leaned towards theatrical effect, so instead of a cuddlesome doll baby I received a gorgeous personage dressed as Flora, the goddess of flowers, whose haughty demeanour froze me up. French dolls were then popular, and this one was a miniature likeness of the Empress Eugénie, with the Spanish beauty's aquiline features and golden hair. Flora wore earrings, a pearl necklace, a white-and-green satin panniered dress garlanded with flowers, and she was about as much like the real goddess as a Louis XIV. marquise masquerading as a deity. I

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much preferred a scarlet-gowned "Bohemian Girl" doll who succeeded her, a lady whose appearance slightly suggested a Past, but she seemed an "understanding" creature, and it was sympathy for which I sought in those days and rarely found.

My grandparents and my aunts disapproved of Mamma, although they were far too just to show it, and no doubt they trembled for the time when I should manifest any of her peculiarities. The grandchildren in Yorkshire never occasioned a moment's qualm, and their destiny was to develop into well-behaved beings who will live and die as such. But, as I said lately to my aunt when we were discussing their many virtues, "They've always had a home and a mother—I've only had snatches of either."

CHAPTER II

A DISMAL CHILDHOOD

I MAGINE that my mother delighted in disturbing the harmony at Brighton, just as some people wantonly revel in odd mixtures of food and drink, knowing that such will disturb the even tenor of their digestion. Her main idea seemed to be "allus movin' on," and in pursuit of it she took me away from Brighton and settled down for a time at Clarence House, Haverstock Hill, a combined girls' school and "paying home" for ladies of limited means. Unfortunately, the one thing my mother and my father had absolutely in common was that love of expensive pleasures which, carried to excess, as a rule, means lost capital, and although my father was making a large income up to the time of his last illness, he had not emulated the Yorkshire thrift of his forbears, and when he died at the age of thirty-five he left little or nothing behind him.

My most vivid memory of the Haverstock Hill period concerns my first child-playmate, Katie Wood, whose grandmother was the world-renowned novelist, Mrs. Henry Wood. Her mother, like Mamma, was another lonely lady whose barque had encountered some of the stormy seas of married life, and they had much in common to discuss and to deplore. Katie was a pretty little girl, but I think both our mothers regarded us more or less as dolls, since I never remember

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mine understanding me as a very human, and often a very naughty little girl.

Close to Haverstock Hill lived my mother's half-sister, a precise person years older than Mamma, married to a big good-natured man whom she always politely addressed as "Mr. Gibbon." In after years, when I read "The Mill on the Floss," I found that Aunt Pullet was the precise counterpart of my Aunt Maria, who was certainly the very last word in Early Victorian ideas and upbringing.

It was this aunt who, in blissful ignorance of fair and frail sinners, took us to see the famous Adah Menken as Mazeppa at Astley's Theatre. It was the only thing over which Mamma ever displayed any sense of humour, and she has often told me about the shock which Aunt Maria experienced when she saw Adah's lovely limbs encased in the thinnest of fleshings, and realised in one dreadful instant the immodesty of the spectacle.

Aunt Maria had one tremendous and lasting grievance, inasmuch as a relative, Mr. Thomas Guppy, had succumbed to the lures of Spiritualism and married the medium afterwards known in spirit circles as "Mrs. Guppy." Her elephantine bulk was often mercilessly caricatured in *Punch* after she had told an incredulous and startled public that she was able to float at will through the air—looking something akin, I should fancy, to a present-day Zeppelin.

I often wonder whether Mamma ever realised the tremendous responsibility a woman incurs when a child is given into her keeping. I fancy not, otherwise my life would have been planned by her on very different lines. The temperaments of certain women are absolutely antagonistic to children, and in my opinion the

A Dismal Childhood

true mother is born, not made. How often the childless woman possesses a more complete understanding of children than the woman to whom child-bearing is an annual festival; some mothers regard little ones as precious souvenirs of the days of married life before Love's wings lost their glowing colours in captivity, others adopt the regal outlook of being the instruments to carry on dynasties, and others regard their offspring as matters of course.

But the unheeding mother who does not know how to protect the tender soul of a child is the most to blame. The little creature, who has exchanged a fair and gracious heaven for a dull and sin-stained earth, is an exile whose mind is not yet attuned to the discords of daily life. I am convinced that children sometimes have flashes of remembrance of celestial scenes, and sometimes even smell the perfume of the flowers of Paradise; these memories die away at last, and life envelops them with a garment of suffering, but, until dreams merge into realities, no imaginative child should ever be hardly dealt with.

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy,
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing boy."

I did not remain long in London, as I developed great constitutional delicacy, and Sir Erasmus Wilson (who always called me "Pussy") told Mamma that I must live at the seaside. So I was sent to Hastings, and then removed by my restless parent to Worthing, where I was given over to the charge of an Irish lady, and Mamma returned to London "without encumbrance."

Then, for the first time, I was alone. I was eight

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years old, a grave little girl who communed with unseen playmates, and I did not appeal to the Irish lady in the least. My new home was totally different from the law and order of St. Peter's House, where there was a place for everything and everything was in its place. In this dreadful domicile disorder was paramount, the food was bad, meals a rough-and-tumble scramble, my curls had vanished for ever, and nobody seemed to care what I wore or how I fared. My most repulsive duty was being forced daily to wash the floor of a room where seven dogs had slept, eaten, and, as often as not, been sick. This form of penance made me shrink from the sight of my roughened red hands, and I wept bitterly as I feebly scrubbed the modern Augean stables. But I escaped afterwards and spent most of my mornings alone on the clean and wholesome beach, where I could read undisturbed and enjoy the bread and butter which sufficed for my dinner. Two books were then my favourites; one, a volume of fairy tales (which merit reprinting), entitled "The Chain of the Water Nymph," and a story in it concerned the old belief that Pharaoh's daughter and her ladies were turned into seals, and that they sometimes swam ashore, doffed their sealskins, and danced on the lonely sands. It was so real to me that I always watched for the Egyptian Princess, and I meditated imploring her to find me a baby sealskin and take me with her to the depths of the sea, away from the horrors of an Irish *ménage* and the Room of the Seven Dogs.

As I went home, after a long day by the sea, a story in the other book coloured my outlook, for it recounted the history of the Saracen girl and her quest of Gilbert à Beckett, and how she eventually found him by repeating the adored name as she wended her way

A Dismal Childhood

through the streets. When I thought of her, Worthing vanished, and I also was a wanderer in old London, but the name on my lips was "Papa." For to me he was only lost, like the Saracen girl's "Gilbert," and I often felt him very close to me. Three years had not deadened but only increased the memory of his vivid personality, and sometimes a passing figure, or the sound of a voice, made my heart beat faster in the belief that he had come back to save me from being unhappy any more.

At length I grew tired of dirt, discomfort and dogs. It was no use telling this to Mamma, as, on her rare visits to Worthing, she was, as ever, a person aloof from me. I also was outwardly well cared for on these occasions, so I perforce played the part of a dumb chorus in the tragedy of my existence. The Irish lady was voluble and flattering, and, as Mamma always judged by appearances, any appeal to her was useless.

So I resolved to go in search of my grandmother; and at this period Brighton took the semblance in my imagination of a sleep-compelling feather-bed, or a comfortable lap where a little girl could nestle and feel safe. I decided, therefore, that the only road towards the attainment of perfect peace was that which led to Brighton, and I began my journey thither one morning after I had done penance as usual. How well I recall that day, when, Worthing left far behind, I plodded steadily along the beach to Shoreham, heedless of the call of the gay sea-poppies to stop and admire them, or the jetsam of cuttlefish which usually appealed to my instincts as a collector.

It was late afternoon when I reached Shoreham Station, and I was very tired. A kindly-faced guard,

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off duty, was waiting on the platform, and, after examining me with some degree of interest, he said :
“ Well, what are you doing here ? ”

“ Please I want to find Grandmamma. ”

“ And who is your Grandmamma ? ”

“ She’s Mrs. Craven, of St. Peter’s House, Brighton ; you must know Grandpapa, everybody on the railway knows *him*. ”

The guard proceeded to question me about my flight. Then he laughed. “ I’ll take you to your Grandmamma, ” he decided.

It was the hour decreed by custom for the exchange of family thought at St. Peter’s House, a tranquil time, usually undisturbed by outside influences, when I, as a prodigal granddaughter, was deposited by the guard in the hall. My arrival caused the greatest consternation, and *the reason why* ?—that domestic curse which always wrecks emotions—followed. Then White was summoned to survey my dishevelled condition.

“ This child’s hair, ” remarked Grandmamma, “ is disgraceful. ”

White assented, and looked at my locks with the eye of one who intends to comb and brush for a lengthy period. “ *And her ears . . .* ” continued Grandmamma. But at the word “ ears ” White seized me and convoyed me to the kitchen ; the familiar wooden tub was placed in front of the fire, and I was bathed with the utmost rigour of the law. But never did a fire glow so kindly, never did a Turkish towel seem so soft as on that night. Worn out by my wanderings, I slept profoundly, and on the morrow I heard that Mamma had been sent for to assist at a family council.

Briefly then my fate was decided—and it was decreed that I should be placed under the care of Mrs.

A Dismal Childhood

Tetley, at Hatton Hall, Wellingborough. Whatever home truths my mother heard from my outspoken grandmother I do not know, but, although outwardly yielding, my mother never forgave the interference with her plans. Certain well-bred instincts prevented her from "making a scene," but she was permanently embittered, and, as her brother had just died and left her well-off, she was no longer obliged to enact the part of the impoverished daughter-in-law.

But the day I left Brighton was intended by Mamma to signalise the loosening of the bond which had so far united me to my father's family, and it was years before I saw any of them again.

My uncle had bequeathed Mamma one of those delightful houses in Victoria Road, and I remember it looked very comfortable and homelike on the evening we arrived from Brighton. A profusion of flowers scented the warm air, and standing before the fire was a tall, thin man, apparently lost in thought. He started slightly as we entered, and my parent literally fluttered forward.

"Oh!" she thrilled. "Oh, how *nice* of you to come!" She gave welcoming hands to the tall stranger, who regarded her drooping head with amused tolerance, and then turned a cold eye in my direction.

"So this is the child?" he asked. "Yes—yes," answered Mamma. "Now, Maude, come and say 'How do you do?' A funny little thing," she added *sotto voce*, as I advanced and shook hands. With the marvellous intuition of a child I knew that this man was false, cold, and cruel; my subconscious self cried aloud in warning of the years to come. I felt that his very personality was a menace; he looked absolutely incapable of affection, and I shrank back.

My Own Past

“Now, Maude,” said Mamma, in a voice like ice, “behave yourself.” “Never mind, dearest Mary,” said the Stranger in resigned tones; “perhaps it is a natural result of the training which this unfortunate child has received . . . you understand . . . jealousy of you . . . and your friends . . . suspicions already implanted in a youthful mind.” He paused and looked steadily at me, and then at Mamma. She, poor thing, was at a loss how to answer. Suddenly she became venomous. “Listen, you nasty child,” she said angrily; “I won’t have any of your whims and fancies.” She rang the bell, and ordered me to be taken upstairs, and, after supping a basin of bread and milk, I was put to bed. I lay awake for some time listening to the voices in the dining-room and watching the odd reflections of the fire on the wall opposite. Then I fell asleep and forgot the unpleasant Stranger in our Midst.

He had gone when I crept down to breakfast, wondering slightly as to the maternal reception. But Mamma was radiant. Her golden hair was most attractive, her grey eyes shone, and apparently I was in favour again. “Well, Topsy,” she said, “now you shall have *such* a nice day. Mr. Waterhouse, the gentleman who was here last night, is going to take us over the Houses of Parliament, and then to the theatre to see *King Lear*.” My face fell, but Mamma was too engrossed with herself to notice me, and she kept looking down the quiet road, like another Sister Anne, to see if anyone was coming.

At last the Stranger arrived, and our pursuit of arduous amusement commenced. My *bête noire* was absolutely thorough in his methods, and we were dragged hither and thither and round and round the Houses without an interval for rest. I was a little girl,

A Dismal Childhood

and easily tired, and by the time night fell, and we arrived at the Princess's Theatre, I was completely exhausted.

The great Edwin Booth played King Lear, and I seem to have a tiny mental picture of him as being a very human actor, but sleep overcame me long before the "Mad" Scene, and nothing on or off the stage had the power to awaken me. Still sleeping, I was carried to a cab, and I only opened my eyes when we reached Victoria Road.

Mamma looked worried and nervous, but more human than usual, and she patted my cold hand gently, and drew me to her. I think she had a little pity for me—perhaps she thought of my fatherless plight—something had evidently momentarily moved her. The tall man surveyed us both with marked disapproval.

"I am sorry to notice," he said, "that you, Mary, apparently countenance indulgence after your daughter has deliberately slept through one of Shakespeare's noblest tragedies. It is wrong of you. I am pained . . . no . . . do not excuse Maude," he added. "One thing is certain. This child has been spoilt. She requires supervision. The rod of discipline must teach her to submit; she must forget that she has apparently done as she likes, and she must remember, dear Mary" (Mamma blushed), "that her mother has a friend who is willing to play a father's part in her upbringing."

CHAPTER III

MY STEPFATHER

MRS. TETLEY'S school at Hatton Hall, Wellingborough, was an old house, once the property of the Vivians, whose arms and motto, "Vive ut Vivas," were displayed everywhere. I remember a wonderful oak staircase, dominated by a great stained-glass window with many quarterings, where I liked to linger and watch the coloured light as it danced upon my hands. It fascinated me because it was so unlike the prosaic windows of my acquaintance, and also because it had watched so many lovely ladies and gallant gentlemen pass up and down the staircase in the bygone days.

I think I was fairly happy at this period. The rambling, grey stone house stood in park-like grounds, separated by a sunk fence from meadows where hosts of daffodils swayed in the March winds, and where one heard the bleatings of lambs and the twitterings of nesting birds. There was a tragic legend connected with the place, and one of the attic rooms had once witnessed a desperate duel fought by two Vivian brothers. The younger fell mortally wounded, and his murderer put the corpse into an old chest and escaped to Italy, leaving his secret to be discovered later when it became necessary to open the locked chest and to ascertain the nature of its contents. The big girls used occasionally to take the more timid of us to the

My Stepfather

gloomy room on half-holidays, and relate the tale with many embellishments until it became so real that we scuttled like rabbits down the dark passages, fearful lest we should encounter the shades of the two brothers on their way to the fatal encounter, and I have more than once fancied I heard the clash of swords which told that the ghostly duel was again in progress.

I remember the one topic of conversation at this time was the end of the world, as, according to Mother Shipton,

“The world to an end shall come
In eighteen hundred and eighty one,”

and a good many people took her quite seriously. We children did, and I studied the Book of Revelation and the horrors of the Judgment with increasing terror. Every night we awaited the Last Trump much in the manner that timorous folk to-day await the possibility of an air raid, and I, like them, took suitable precautions. I thought the most sensible thing would be to lay in a stock of sweets, which I could eat quietly until my turn came to be judged, and I devoutly hoped that the grown-ups would receive the attention of the Almighty first, as I knew their lives were usually lengthy and their sins many.

But nothing happened, and Mother Shipton's “tag” was, I am convinced, solely intended for a joke. She could not, as a professional seer, do better than prophesy the end of everything, and she therefore decreed solely for the sake of what she considered to be rhythm, that as, in her mind, “come” rhymed with “one,” the year of the calamity did not matter in the least.

One day in July Mrs. Tetley told me that Mamma wished me to give my schoolfellows a fruit and cake

My Own Past

tea in the garden. This unexpected pleasure astonished me, and I asked why I was so favoured by Providence. "Your Mamma was married this morning," said Mrs. Tetley, "and she wants you to celebrate her wedding day." "Is it Mr. Waterhouse?" I demanded; and the answer "Yes" plunged me into the deepest gloom. The charm of the summer was lost on me, the wedding feast became a funeral meal, and, unknowingly, I was the chief mourner at the burial of childhood, happiness, and all that makes up the sum total of the beauty of life.

The holidays arrived, and I left Wellingborough for ever. Mamma met me in London, and as we drove to Waterloo she told me that my new home was at Teddington, and that I must be a good child and do my best to please Mr. Waterhouse.

He was waiting for us on the platform, and in my eyes he appeared more sinister than before. I hardly spoke to him, and crouched in a corner of the railway carriage, feeling like a very miserable and sorry mouse. Every time I encountered his cold grey eye I quivered mentally, and I wondered that Mamma seemed so at her ease with him. I was, by turns, sullen, defiant, terrified and helpless, and, obsessed with these emotions, I first saw the home destined to shelter Mamma and myself.

The house was ivy clad, with a tree-bordered drive, and a profusion of tea roses flung their fragrance upon the evening air. Inside, the rooms were cool and pretty; my bedroom windows were framed in festoons of wistaria, and as I leaned out the perfume of the garden met me, and—all the slumbering paganism in me awoke and responded to the call. For the healing earth was henceforth destined to be my truest mother,

My Stepfather

and in after years I was to experience all the intoxication of Nature and the joyous kinship of the wild : I was to glory in lonely stretches of moorland, and watch the crumpled velvet hills grow grey at sunset ; I was to journey far, and listen to the sound of falling waters heard in solemn solitudes when all the world was covered with snow. Forests were to call me, and I was to see the face of Pan peering through thickets, and hear him piping to the nymphs of the streams and the woodlands. It was my lot later to see with pagan eyes that the bluebells are only in reality a blue carpet woven by spring to beautify the earth, to know that few things are more lovely than the dew-drenched heart of a rose, and that nothing really smells so sweet as the fragrance of white pinks in the morning.

The garden claimed me, just as the Paradou claimed Albine, and my love for flowers is a strange tenderness which has survived many better emotions. Flowers yield me ungrudging sweetness ; they have warmed my frozen senses with the delight of colour, and I think their souls must pass away in a sigh of perfume long before their outward shapes wither and decay.

I had a special corner of my own in the beautiful garden at Fair Lawn, where clematis rioted over high grey palings and threw its arms around the roses which raised their heads in greeting. Here I used to sit alone and happy, after Mr. Waterhouse had insulted the Deity with parrot-like prayers and the prodigious breakfast of baked meats was over. I positively hated these morning devotions ; the mechanical servants knelt by the sideboard, Mamma was shadowed by an arm-chair, and I furtively fidgeted and watched the clock, whilst my stepfather called upon God in loud domineering tones to deal mercifully with what seemed to be

My Own Past

in his idea the very worst family of sinners in the world.

The whole proceeding was absolutely out of place, as the coffee smelt potently during the discourse and the chafing dish emitted the odours sacred to kidneys and bacon ; God seemed entirely apart from our smug respectability, and I wondered why families who wished to pray before breakfast didn't go into the garden to do so.

Mamma and I were now nothing better than prisoners. Mr. Waterhouse was a man of mystery, who even then must have been leading the Jekyll and Hyde existence which came to light many years later. To the outward eye he was a highly respectable member of a prosperous firm of spice merchants, a man whose character and probity were unblemished, and whose regular life was a mute reproach to more frivolous married men. Indeed, so regular were his habits that these virtues were able to cover a multitude of sins, and I remember Mamma once tearfully saying : " How could I think there was anything wrong with a man who was never late for dinner?"

Mr. Waterhouse had deliberately mapped out a plan of campaign in his pursuit and capture of Mamma. He was shrewd enough to gauge her weak points, and he knew how to play upon them. When a far-seeing family friend suggested that Mamma's fortune should be placed in the hands of trustees, he merely remarked to her : " Oh, well . . . *certainly*, if you cannot trust me." His pained attitude brought about (as he intended it should) the desired result, and Mamma cheerfully gave up all her money into his hands.

If my stepfather had been more affectionate and more human he would not have possessed the smallest

My Stepfather

hold over Mamma's quaint soul. She dared not oppose him, but I believe that, like most bullies, he was an abject coward, and that he was only clever at the ever-green game of bluffing a woman. He had modelled himself to contrast favourably with Papa, who, poor man, was not only late, but who often never came home to dinner at all; and the metaphor "dinner" applied to Mr. Waterhouse's interpretation to Mamma of all the conjugal virtues.

But my stepfather soon showed the mailed fist when once we were safely stowed away in a backwater of social life. He allowed Mamma to make no new acquaintances, and callers at Fair Lawn never had their visits returned. In all the years we spent at Teddington no stranger ever broke bread with us, we never met any of Mr. Waterhouse's friends, and, so far as intercourse with the outside world was concerned, we were practically buried alive. He went to the City punctually at 8.30, he returned punctually at 7.30, and he required of us a complete record of how we had spent every hour of the dreary day.

"Don't tell me you can't remember what you did," he would testily remark when our memories failed us. "*You must remember.*"

Thus I speedily became an absolute moral coward, and I was not guiltless of many small deceits. I had once been a fearless creature, and I had scorned to tell a lie; now I lied often—and glibly—to save myself from the terror of cross-examination. I realised it avoided trouble to play with my dolls until five minutes before the tyrant's return, and then to act a lie and let him discover me apparently deep in the intricacies of map-drawing. My stepfather ruined my moral sense, and I can never forgive him for so doing. But

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I hated him steadily, coldly, with the fixed determination to escape; and, as he had definitely forbidden any communication with my father's family, the Brighton days were a thing of the past. Mamma was speedily tamed by the whip of fear, and she existed in a dull state of obedience to her master. The theatre, which she had always loved, was anathema, dress was a frivolous incident; food and drink mattered very considerably, since, like most other cold sensualists, my stepfather always believed in the value of self-indulgence.

Mamma let me read what I liked if I "put it away" before Mr. Waterhouse returned, so I absorbed an extraordinary mixture of novels. At one period I thought myself akin to Maggie Tulliver and Jane Eyre, and later I longed to have been Charlotte Corday or else Théroigne de Méricourt, whose deeds of daring stirred my imagination; and I considered modern life to be very humdrum after the exciting times of the French Revolution.

Sundays at Teddington were dreadful days of unrest. We walked across Bushey Park to the Chapel Royal at Hampton Court, and all the way thither my stepfather questioned me respecting French verbs and French grammar until we commenced to worship God.

Directly service was over I was again cross-questioned. "Why do you kneel down when you first go into church?" asked my stepfather. "Because you and Mamma do," I answered. He was horrified. "Wicked child—you *kneel* to *pray*. Answer me: For what will you pray next Sunday?" I paused; then desperately, "*For a doll*," adding in a burst of angry tears, "Oh, *why* can't I be like other little girls?"

My Stepfather

During all the dreadful Sunday afternoon I was catechised, "collect-ed," and questioned on events in the Old and New Testament, and as a final benediction my finger-nails were cut very short, which jarred every nerve in my body, and then I was allowed to go. Often and often I wildly surmised as to the possibility of my stepfather being Satan in disguise, but I dismissed the idea as absurd when I reflected that my persecutor's instruments of torture were the Scriptures and the Book of Common Prayer, both of which would hardly be popular with the Evil One.

I was soon sent back to school, this time to the old house at Beaconsfield which looks down the hill towards High Wycombe. I now first discovered how much I loved music, and I often used secretly to "play" books instead of printed music, an imaginative form of amusement which afforded me the greatest satisfaction.

The delightful country surroundings of Beaconsfield were then among the untrodden ways, and Burke's Grove was unknown to the speculative builder. I remember long walks among its leafy solitudes where the wild cherry trees grew in profusion, and I used to admire the fragile loveliness of their blossoms in the spring. There was a curious ice-house in Burke's Grove, the last trace of the original building, as the mansion once occupied by the statesman had been completely gutted by fire many years before.

The old rectory and Beaconsfield Church always interested me. I saw Lord Burnham (then Mr. Levy Lawson) every Sunday in the Lawson pew, and I also remember admiring Mrs. Harry Lawson, a beautiful bride whose gowns were objects of envy to all the feminine members of the congregation.

My Own Past

Something evidently displeased Mr. Waterhouse in the Beaconsfield regime, so I was speedily transferred to Miss Holland's school at Elm Lodge, Petersham, where I spent three happy years. The house was delightfully situated close to Sudbrook Park, and it was here that Charles Dickens wrote "Nicholas Nickleby," a circumstance which gladdened my heart, since I was a lover of Dickens, and felt especially sympathetic towards the troubles of Nicholas Nickleby.

I am glad to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to Miss Holland, although the kind-hearted woman has been dead many years. The best way to describe her is to say that she was "comforting," and she mothered her charges in the most affectionate manner. Miss Holland cultivated my love of books, she encouraged me to write down what I felt, and it was at Elm Lodge that I first received outside appreciation of my literary efforts: I was awarded a bronze medal by the editor of *Little Folks*, and I remember that I was almost beside myself with pleasurable excitement. Who ever forgets their first taste of success? Miss Holland never tired of listening to me, and when we "crocodile" down the avenues which led to Ham House I generally contrived to walk by her side, and Prinny, the apoplectic King Charles, waddled along in the rear.

But the kindly glow engendered by friendship and sympathy soon faded when I found myself under home influences again. I tried to make Mamma understand that I knew our life was totally different from that led by other people, but my words did not make much impression.

"Don't you think it odd that we never see anyone, or go anywhere?" I asked.

Picture Story Writing Words Competition.



LA BELLE SAUVAGE YARD,
LUDGATE HILL, E.C.

The Editor of Little Folks
has the pleasure to send to
Miss Maud M. C. Cravena Member Marshal
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Honor.

May. 1885.

My first success!!!
Age fourteen

My Own Past

"I've not thought much about it; Mr. Waterhouse doesn't like strangers, I suppose that's the reason," was the response.

"But, Mamma, we're not *happy*," I persisted. "What will become of me when I am grown up? Am I to be a governess? For all that Mr. Waterhouse thinks necessary in life is lessons."

"A governess? Don't be so silly," said Mamma, startled out of her composure. "Of course not; there's plenty of Uncle Joseph's money, and you will 'come out' and—I suppose you'll marry someone some day; that's what girls usually do after they 'finish.'"

"It's such a waste of time doing sums and maps that aren't a bit useful when you are grown up," I argued. "Nobody bothers about the things one learns at school *then*. And, oh," I continued, "how I wish Mr. Waterhouse wouldn't frighten us so. I wonder why you ever fell in love with him!"

"It's only girls who fall in love," said Mamma, shocked at the idea of the tender passion obsessing the mature mind. "I married your stepfather because I thought he would be a very gentlemanly man in the house, and also because he would take an interest in your future!"

"Couldn't *you* take an interest without him?" I urged. "Oh, Mamma, how did you first meet him?"

"He was a friend of your father's," she replied evasively, but I felt that she was not speaking the truth. How Mamma made his acquaintance has always remained a mystery, and to the day of her death I never found it out.

I was sixteen when Mamma asserted herself, and determined that I should complete my education at a good finishing school. She had never demanded any

My Stepfather

account of her money from Mr. Waterhouse; she trusted him, and she firmly believed her comfortable capital to be intact. Any household economies were explained away as "saving for the time when Maude grows up," but although she possessed no love for me, she had a certain amount of maternal pride which urged her to give me a proper "send off."

As we were to discover later, Mamma's capital was *not* intact, since Mr. Waterhouse, unknown to us, specialised in femininity, and I fear that some lady had her allowance considerably reduced when Mamma decided to "finish" my education. But my stepfather made no protest, which might have aroused suspicion, he knew that his safety to enjoy life lay in never deviating from "coming home punctually to dinner," and, as he always did this, to query his morals and expenditure would have been a sacrilege.

There is no doubt that, once a man sets out to deceive, he embarks upon a most strenuous life if he wishes to keep a woman thoroughly and completely in the dark. He has first to become a skilled and original liar, he must play his part as cleverly as any professional actor (a dreadful strain for an unimaginative man), and he must study the ethics of Machiavelli if he is doubtful as to his own capabilities for intrigue. Added to these essentials, he must later be able to smother his conscience, banish his better self, kill all decent feelings, and then, and then only, will he be a complete success. Men usually deceive their wives through force of habit and their mistresses through fear, and whether the game is worth the proverbial candle I do not know. But I always believe that retribution overtakes the cold, calculating deceiver, and that "he who leads more lives than one, more deaths than one shall die."

CHAPTER IV

DAYS OF FRIENDSHIP

THE one delightful episode in my dreary childhood was my friendship with my mother's old friend Thomas Hakewill, who lived at the house which he had built at the corner of Harrington Square when Camden Town was considered to be almost in the country.

I first remember Mr. Hakewill as an old man, since he was born in the year 1800, but his intelligence was marvellous, his memory unailing, and his faculties unimpaired. He came from a well-known Devonshire family, and as he was rich he was able to indulge freely in his love for pictures, of which he possessed a wonderful collection, sold at Christie's after his death in 1894.

Not even my stepfather could prevent Mamma from allowing me to accept invitations to stay at Harrington Square, and these visits speedily became an ever-recurring joy. When I was quite a little girl, Mr. Hakewill discovered that his treasures appealed to my imagination, and he therefore lost no time in gradually training me to appreciate the beautiful in Art.

The walls all over the house were literally papered with paintings, and I used to listen attentively when Mr. Hakewill explained that the great Van Dyck of the "Virgin and Child," which hung over the fireplace in the library, was not entirely the work of the master, inasmuch as the Infant Christ was painted by his pupils; he told me how this was apparent to the trained eye of

Days of Friendship

the collector, and we discussed the quality of the colour in the Virgin's robes, and the grace and beauty of the entire composition.

Mr. Hakewill had made the "Grand Tour" as a youth, and he would relate how he stood on the battle-field of Waterloo in 1817 and watched the plough turning up quantities of human bones, arms and accoutrements, striking evidence of the fearful price we paid for victory on that historic day.

He also used to tell me how he was present at some of the excavations at Pompeii, and I was allowed reverently to handle the "tear" vases and other relics which he had brought away from there. It was so pleasant in the dusty library, when my old friend usually gave me his bunch of keys, and I opened delightful places full of hidden treasures. There were boxes of old jewellery, quaint combs so dear to ladies of the Regency, souvenir rings with mottoes, painted eyes and miniatures, hair tortured into the semblance of flowers or trees, and exquisite fans created long ago when Louis XV. reigned in France. I learnt what fine work was accomplished by the craftsman of bygone days, I heard all the romance of beauty and art, and I drank in the knowledge eagerly.

Mr. Hakewill owned a large picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds, known as "The Sisters"—two seated figures, one playing a guitar and the other listening. The colour scheme was lovely in its subdued harmonies, and the faces were full of the refined somewhat sly charm peculiar to most of the women who sat to Reynolds. There had been a third sister, but as Mr. Hakewill disliked the figure it was painted out. I wonder whether the purchaser of "The Sisters" knew this, and ever had the lady reinstated?

My Own Past

I remember a marvellous Romney, "Lady Hamilton as a Nun," which depicted Emma as a *religieuse* in white draperies, the only hint of the real woman lying in the beautiful face and the scarlet of the seductive mouth. Another lovely picture I used to call "The Bacchante from Highgate," as it was purchased there, and I have rarely seen a more beautiful example of the genius of Greuze. It was a somewhat small canvas, and represented the head of a girl, innocent of the cloying sweetness which is so peculiar to the French artist; this Bacchante was passionate, real, vivid, and she always seemed to be demanding, "Whither, O Bacchus, wilt thou lead me?"

She was crowned with vine leaves, and clusters of grapes glowed dully in the splendour of her auburn hair; a leopard skin was thrown carelessly over one lovely shoulder, and she surveyed life through half-closed eyes, smiling the inscrutable smile of perfect knowledge as she did so.

I almost adored this wicked, wild creature, and directly I arrived at Harrington Square I invariably went to see her. I was so obsessed that at last she became alive, and I have often as a child stood on a chair and kissed her because I loved her, and because I thought she understood how much I would like to live with her, away from the world, free and happy for evermore.

Mr. Hakewill possessed two fine landscapes by Gainsborough, a "Mrs. Robinson as Perdita," and a fine portrait of Cromwell, over which some zealous soul had painted the likeness of Charles I. The last picture had originally belonged to Mr. Lambert, of the Wood House, Finchley, afterwards called New Southgate, and when it was sent by him to be cleaned the features

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of Oliver Cromwell were uncovered. Directly Mr. Lambert saw whom the portrait represented he was furious. "Take it away," he shouted; "I'll not give the rascal house-room!" So in this manner the Protector's portrait passed into Mr. Hakewill's possession.

On one of the landings hung part of the original frieze designed by Rubens for the Banqueting Hall at Whitehall, a riot of Cupids, and a lovely bit of colour, and I specially recall an exquisite "St. Cecilia" crowned with laurels, a serenely beautiful austere young face, the conception of an Italian artist. There were some Bouchers, full of the alluring sensuality in which he and his age delighted, and some fine examples of Teniers and Turner. Mr. Hakewill made no attempt to classify his pictures, but he insisted that I should make a catalogue of them in order to familiarise myself with the subjects and the artists. I remember I spent hours writing down names in an exercise book, and I found the mythological pictures great orthographical stumbling-blocks, and decided that "Pomona and Vertumnus" was very difficult to transcribe properly.

I loved best of all to look at a quantity of beautiful engravings by Bartolozzi and Wouvermans, which were kept in a tall-boy in the dining-room, and I should judge the collection to be very valuable to-day. I remember the deep appeal made to me in all the Bartolozzi studies, and how I revelled in the pseudo-classical style with its artificial charm, so dear to the painters and engravers of the eighteenth century.

Mr. Hakewill was an inveterate theatre-goer, and he was a perfect encyclopædia of theatrical gossip. I am filled with regret that he never kept a diary, and that I was not a memoir writer in those days. What a book of Recollections he could have supplied!

My Own Past

I often went to the theatre with him, and I remember seeing Wilson Barrett's production of *Hamlet* at the Princess's Theatre. Miss Eastlake's rendering of Ophelia stirred my imagination to such an extent that I burst into song, and wrote an ode commencing :

"Close where the willow bends its glossy leaves,
Distraught with dreadful woe, Ophelia comes."

There was a great deal more, and my muse was encouraged somewhat in the manner of eighteenth-century bards, for a kind patron presented me with a five-pound note, and said the verse was "very nice indeed."

I witnessed the first production of the ballet *Excelsior* at Her Majesty's, which was then supposed to be a gigantic spectacular undertaking, as the entire company, scenery, dresses, and orchestra had been translated from Milan to London. It was quite interesting and very well produced, especially the scenes of the Mont Cenis Tunnel and the sand-storm in the Desert of Sahara.

It was delightful to go out with Mr. Hakewill, and I never had a dull moment, but in contrast to these happy theatrical adventures I remember a dreadful experience when Aunt Maria took me to see Irving's *Faust*, which, as the text was Goethe's, she fondly imagined would be good and simple, like the "dear Germans."

But, when the "Well" scene introduced the possibility of Margaret having an unwanted and unlegalised baby, Aunt almost insisted upon leaving the Lyceum, and it was only by turning a deaf ear in her direction that I was able to sit it out.

One of the frequent visitors at Harrington Square was Mr. Ludovici, known in the 'eighties as a charm-

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ing genre artist. He was a kindly old man, rather like a benevolent Father Christmas, and he dearly loved a game of cribbage with Mr. Hakewill and his daughter. I remember a delightful portrait Mr. Ludovici painted of a cousin of the Hakewills—Bessie Helmore, a typical Devonshire beauty with a skin of cream and roses, who married Henry Neville's son. In my opinion Bertie Neville completely outshone his father as a handsome man, and I always wonder why he chose the Stock Exchange instead of following in his father's footsteps and becoming a *jeune premier* of romantic drama.

One story which Mr. Hakewill used to tell me concerned the strange doings of the Luttrells, who in the early part of the last century lived at Nethway, near Totnes.

One day the whole family disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed them up; all the doors of the house were discovered to be locked, and no traces remained of the occupants, who for some unknown reason had suddenly fled to Dunster Castle on the borders of North Devon.

The place remained deserted, and Mr. Hakewill related how he and some boys once determined to break in at night and see for themselves in what condition the house had been left. They did so, and a veritable palace of enchantment met their eyes. In the dining-room the decayed remains of the last meal were still on the table; but the candles had guttered out in the tarnished candlesticks, and the wine was dry in the decanters. Dust lay over everything, and the chairs were hastily pushed aside as if some tremendous news had suddenly terminated the meal. The bedrooms also displayed traces of precipitate flight. All the wardrobes were open, and dresses, bonnets and mantles

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were thrown about the floor in hopeless confusion. There seemed to have been barely time to collect the simplest personal belongings, and all the paraphernalia of silver and perfume still lay on the dressing tables—hardly anything had been taken away.

For many years the mansion awaited the return of the fugitives. They never came back, and eventually, I believe, the authorities dealt with the contents of the house, and a crop of stories gradually grew up around it, though the mystery was never satisfactorily solved.

When I remember those days of friendship and understanding I always regard them as the green places where my caravan has rested, precious thoughts which consoled me later when Sorrow afterwards became my companion and pleasures passed. The household at Harrington Square has long since been scattered, and the dear old man who was kind to me sleeps in a crowded London cemetery. But his memory remains unchanged, and I should like to feel that he somehow knows how grateful I am for the flashes of happiness which he gave me in my youth.

The time now arrived when Mamma, after turning over and discussing endless prospectuses, finally decided to place me at Boston House, Chiswick, a well-known finishing school successfully presided over by Miss Wilson.

Boston House is thought by some people to be the "Miss Pinkerton's" of "Vanity Fair," the school so detested by the immortal Becky; others have located it on the Mall, but I think the Pinkerton establishment must have been a composite portrait of two places, of which Boston House was one. It certainly was a school for young ladies at the time of Becky Sharp's sojourn at Chiswick, and it has many other points of resem-

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blance which tally with Thackeray's description. It was a wonderful old place; and it is a strange coincidence that two of my schools should chance to have been houses with histories, as Boston House was steeped in the Balzac-like tragedy of a jealous husband who murdered his young wife and buried her in the garden. Lord Fairfax was the gentleman who broke up the harmony of the home, and Lady Boston the unlucky person to be found out; and I remember a curious little room known as "Lady Boston's boudoir," where tradition related she was discovered by her husband reading a letter whose contents left little doubt that the sender was not a disciple of Plato.

Aggrieved aristocrats in the good old days did not, like their descendants, waste the time of His Majesty's judges, and wash their often exceedingly dirty linen in court. There were then no evening papers, so the value of publicity was not realised by disputing couples, and no personal paragraphs and snapshots of smart sinners brightened the news-sheets of the period. When a wife transgressed, the co-respondent was generally "called out," and the lady was spirited away to one of her husband's seats, and there left to eat her heart out in semi-captivity. When husbands were the offenders, their wives did not often divorce them, but forgave them until seventy times seven, and then, fortified by the fact that knowledge represents power, sought solace for their sorrows elsewhere. What was the ultimate fate of Lord Boston I do not know, but like most widowers no doubt he managed to support his bereavement with equanimity and fortitude.

Boston House was certainly a beautiful old building, and the great schoolroom had been the ballroom in the days when Lady Boston dallied and danced there with

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Lord Fairfax. The walls were picked out in flower-festooned panels, and the ceiling was elaborately decorated in stucco. Over the fireplace was a large marble bas-relief of Venus and Cupid, and on either side were medallions of Lord and Lady Boston, encircled with true lovers' knots and other fantasies.

Almost the first person who spoke to me on the day I started "lessons" was a tall girl with a mass of copper-coloured hair, which alone would have made any face attractive. She introduced herself as Edith Thornycroft, and from that moment I became her devoted admirer and willing slave. Edith, or "Leo" as I called her, came from a family famous in the history of sculpture, and I think I am right in saying that her grandfather was responsible for the group of "Commerce" in the Albert Memorial. Her grandmother was a friend of Queen Victoria, and had executed many likenesses in marble of the young princes and princesses. The Thornycrofts were all clever people, and I think a great artist was lost to the world in Edith. Her paintings were exquisite, full of colour and soul, and her work must have reflected, I fancy, her beautiful nature, since I have never met anyone who comes up to my ideal of goodness as Edith Thornycroft did. She was ever a kind and sympathetic comrade, and her affection was precious to my starved soul because she always made an appeal to my better self.

I often went to Eyot Villa, the artistic home on the Mall associated with the Thornycrofts, not far away from the torpedo works which were then at Chiswick, and Mr. (now Sir John) Thornycroft was the head of the great business.

I remember admiring the plaster group of "Boadicea and her Daughters," the work of Edith's

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grandfather, which was housed somewhere in the garden at Eyot Villa. I little dreamt in those days that it would eventually be cast in bronze, and that I should see it set up in after years at the end of Westminster Bridge.

The whole atmosphere at Eyot Villa was artistic, and I succumbed to the lure of "Liberty" when I saw the quaint gowns and the lovely colours and embroideries worn by the Thornycroft girls, whose picturesqueness was only properly set off by appropriate garments. I sometimes met Hamo Thornycroft, Edith's uncle, whose genius has always appealed to me, although I think he has never excelled his early work of the wonderful "Artemis," now at Eaton Hall. This conception of Diana touches Greek Art at its zenith, and it is almost a pity that the statue is not the property of the nation, since, in my opinion, we possess nothing like it in modern Art.

Edith told me that the model for the dog was a poor lost creature which came one night for food and shelter to Mr. Thornycroft's studio at Melbury Road. It took up its abode there, and gradually, under the influences of kindness and good food, it developed into a beautiful animal, to be presently immortalised by its new owner as the hound of Artemis.

Boat Race Days were great institutions at Chiswick, and I always witnessed the contest from Eyot Villa. There was a lunch or tea, according to the hour of the race, and it was very amusing to watch the good-tempered crowds who surged down the Mall, and to buy light or dark blue plush monkeys from the voluble vendors. One Boat Race Day I was standing on the balcony, when Edith came up with a short, somewhat untidy-looking man whom I had never seen before.

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“ I want to introduce you to Mr. Benjamin Baker,” she said, adding to him, “ This is my friend, Maude Craven.”

Mr. Baker stood and stared without speaking until I began to think that something must be wrong with me. Then he spoke. “ Tell me,” he asked, “ are you by any chance William Craven’s daughter?” “ Yes—yes,” I answered. “ Then,” said he, giving me a bear-like hug, regardless of everyone, “ then *you* are Miriam !”

I stared at him. “ My dear girl, your father and I were in John Fowler’s office together, and many a time have I played with you when you were a tiny mite. Don’t you remember me?—you are very like your father, by the way—a pity he died, he was as clever as paint,” he added reminiscently.

I was simply in the seventh heaven to meet someone who had known Papa, and we chatted together for a long time. Benjamin Baker was then a celebrated engineer, just within sight of completing the building of the Forth Bridge, to be presently followed by his life’s triumph—the great Dam of Assouan.

“ Ben Baker,” as his friends called Sir Benjamin, was a simple and unspoilt individual, who, I think, valued his worldly success simply for the pleasure which it gave his mother, to whom he was devoted. He was careless to a degree where dress was concerned ; indeed, he was known to certain young and irreverent engineers as “ The Great Unwashed,” and his untidy appearance certainly occasionally warranted the sobriquet.

He had a heart of gold and the brain of a genius, and he was ever ready to render assistance and encouragement to those members of his own profession who wanted a helping hand. I afterwards heard that Sir

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Benjamin and my father had been like brothers in the "John Fowler" days; he had the strongest belief in his friend's future, and he always lamented the life so suddenly cut off before its early promise could be fulfilled.

The time I spent at Boston House greatly improved me. I became more self-reliant, I learnt to judge for myself, and I was always encouraged to compete with others. The scheme of education was for each girl to try and excel in whatever she took up; and although Miss Wilson was severely unapproachable, she was perfectly just and never grudged praise when it was really merited.

I had two friendly rivals in literature and composition—Carrie Tuke, the daughter of the great mental specialist, and a plump girl with pretty blue eyes who is known to the many admirers of her novels as Muriel Hine. I somehow contrived to carry off the prizes, unfairly, I am sure, as Carrie's compositions were far better samples of correct English, and Muriel Hine had then, as now, a *flair* for effective description.

Carrie Tuke and I became friendly, and I occasionally went with her to Manor House, Chiswick, then a private asylum, and the place where poor Sir Edwin Landseer spent some of his "clouded" days. There were many of his original drawings there, beautiful examples whose composition and technique did not give the slightest hint that the brain of the artist was unhinged at the time the sketches were evolved.

The wonderful gardens were a mass of colour and perfume in summer, and I simply revelled in their luxuriant loveliness. I sometimes told Carrie about the garden at Teddington, and I confided many of my fears to her, and as she possessed an abundance of sound

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common sense, I felt she might be relied upon to express a perfectly unbiased opinion. But the problem of my home life was too much for her; I, myself, could see no solution of it, and every day when I heard my schoolfellows say how happy they were, and how much they loved their parents, I felt revolt rising in my soul.

I often used to see William Whiteley in those far-off days, as his niece, Edith Mason, was at school with me, and the "Universal Provider" was devoted to her. Every Saturday his gorgeous mail phaeton drew up at Boston House, and Mr. Whiteley descended, laden with all kinds of dainties. We girls highly approved of him, for we occasionally went shopping in Bayswater on half-holidays, and his orders at "The Grove" were that the young ladies from Boston House were always to be supplied with a lavish tea, free of cost to them.

Chiswick was, however, soon destined to become another milestone, as Mamma decided that I must receive the final coat of finishing varnish at Brussels. I had been happy during the period I spent at Boston House, and I always loved the old-world suburb because of its many romantic associations. The Mall is, I think, one of the most picturesque spots outside London, and Hammersmith Terrace is, of course, identified with Emma Hamilton, when as Emma Lyon she lived there in the employment of the quack doctor who made her pose as the personification of Hygeia.

The dust that once was lovely, arrogant Barbara Cleveland moulders somewhere in the vaults under Chiswick Church, but her house still stands on the Mall, unaltered since her day. I have often wondered whether she used to watch the river flowing towards

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the sea and hate all nature for its indifference to her tempestuous mind, as doubtless her dark soul chafed wildly in its last cage, when dropsy had made her body ludicrous, and the riches which could have purchased friends for her had long since vanished.

The Chiswick of my girlhood is vastly changed; "desirable villa residences" cover the site of Manor House, the apple orchards off Chiswick Lane have been obliterated by bricks, and the beautiful wrought-iron gates which used to dominate Duke's Avenue now stand at the Piccadilly entrance of Devonshire House.

Sentimental curiosity once impelled me to revisit Boston House and endeavour to reconstruct the days before I knew what life meant. Alas! there was no Boston House, for it was smugly disguised as St. Veronica's Retreat! I rang the bell, and the nun to whom I proffered my request to see my former school kindly allowed me to wander through some of the rooms.

But the coldness of a religious institution pervaded everything, and chilled the pilgrim of sentiment who had hoped for the friendly warmth of old associations. The ballroom was now transformed into a chapel, painted in slate and black, all the decorations had disappeared, and the festooned panels were severely plain.

I looked for Venus and Cupid—they were nowhere to be seen, and the nun soon answered my unspoken question. "The sculpture was quite out of place," said she; "we had it removed."

I sighed, but somehow I think that, when St. Veronica took over the old house, Venus arose from her marble couch, stretched her shapely limbs, and left Chiswick with Cupid long before she had to contemplate the awful indignity of being forcibly removed.

CHAPTER V

PLEASANT DAYS IN FRANCE

MY grandfather died in the summer of 1887. My mother, yielding to persistent entreaties, had allowed me to pay a surreptitious visit to Brighton in the January before his death.

The impression that I made after six years' severance from the old regime was unfavourable, and I felt it in my bones the very moment I arrived. The weather was not propitious for travelling, and, although it was fine when I left London, snow had fallen and was still falling heavily at Brighton, and it was impossible for the cab to manage the steep hill which led to the house on the Downs where my grandparents now lived. I therefore had to walk the rest of the way.

I was wearing smart buckled shoes and silk stockings, and by the time I reached Wellesley House my feet were soaked through. It was an ineffective home-coming under these circumstances, and, as my aunts surveyed me toiling up the drive, bedraggled and snow-swept, my return was an absolute spectacular fiasco.

I had no umbrella, and the melting snowflakes dripped from me in little pools as I stood receiving a somewhat embarrassed welcome. I knew that the minds of my aunts had instinctively reverted to Yorkshire, and to their other nieces, who would have braved the snow in stout boots, goloshes, and mackintoshes, and then emerged high and dry from those sensible coverings.

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But a niece who was obliged to sit in somebody else's shoes and stockings whilst her own were being dried was an object which neither appealed to sentiment nor to common sense. I was a failure. Mine was, to quote a trite expression, "an over-delayed resurrection," and I was a distinctly undesirable Lazarus.

Nothing and nobody had altered where my family were concerned—they all looked as if Time had forgotten them until he suddenly determined that Grandpapa's hour had sounded, and that his sands were well-nigh run. In the late afternoon I was taken upstairs, and after waiting a few minutes I was told to go in and see the invalid. The bedroom was so large and lofty that the big four-poster seemed quite lost, and its heavy curtains were like a cave of darkness. A shaded lamp gave a very subdued light, and at first I could not make out the whereabouts of Grandpapa, until I suddenly saw two bright eyes burning in a sunken face topped by an old-fashioned tasselled nightcap. The eyes surveyed me steadily for a long time; at last a thin hand beckoned me. "Come here," said a voice. I advanced. "So you are William's daughter—well, you've been a long time away."

"I couldn't help it. I wasn't allowed to come."

"That's your mother's fault," decided my grandparent with sudden and acrimonious vigour; "you are not much like her, you've got your father's eyes." This remark pleased me, for I had hitherto felt myself distinctly outside the pale of family resemblance, and I pressed Grandpapa's hand with dutiful affection. He did not notice me or speak to me again, so, much heartened by possessing Papa's eyes, I crept softly downstairs.

Things went better after that, and I believe had I

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at first worn stout shoes and thick stockings all might yet have been well. But the colour had run in the stockings, and the patent leather had curled up through over-zealous drying, so the waste of expensive material instantly became another offence to Yorkshire thrift. However, as I have always possessed the saving grace of being able to see the point of view of other people, I am able deeply to sympathise with my family's grievance on this occasion.

Grandmamma talked to me very kindly and affectionately, but she sighed when she looked at me. "Poor child!" she said, and she told me to be a good girl, not to forget her, and to wear "this." "This" was a beautiful single-stone diamond ring, which Mr. Waterhouse afterwards placed in his own safe custody, and I never saw it again.

I was shrewd enough to realise that it is very difficult to pick up the stitches of family life when once they have dropped, and I believe that romantic sentiment about "my son's child" chiefly exists in novels. Mamma had weakly allowed me to pass out of the old life, at first doubtless to gratify her personal spite, and then afterwards because she couldn't help it, and my relations resented her attitude, as few people are Christian-like enough to be slighted and still to "keep smiling."

If I had opened my heart and said that my life was a miserable existence, and that I was absolutely warped and spoilt by the treatment which I had received, who would not have believed that my statements were exaggerated, or else prompted by an unreasoning dislike of my stepfather? So I kept silence, and let things take their course.

It was only when I afterwards stayed at Brighton

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and saw my cousins from Ilkley that I knew what it meant to be a "tainted wether of the flock." Minnie and Nellie were never untidy, their skirts never gaped or came away from their trim black belts, their hair was severely brushed off their foreheads and tied carefully in the neatest of bows. They saved their pocket-money, they helped in the house, and they were exactly the nice sensible girls one might expect to result from the nice sensible marriage of nice sensible people.

My irreproachable cousins were a splendid foil to me, for although my frocks were good, I did not wear my clothes effectively, and as I was always in a hurry I never paid much attention to the unconsidered trifles which make up the perfect whole.

Thus, all things considered, I am now able to understand that I must have affected my family somewhat in the manner of a moral blister, or else as an aching tooth which nags and jags, and seemingly serves no good purpose in life. What *did* appeal to them was my "oddness," which always afforded fresh topics for conversation, and they also shared a sort of aggrieved pride in my good looks.

I could not sew, I could not interest myself in fowls, and I evinced no delight whatever in the chaste society of curates. The things which appealed to me were poetry and the romance of history; real people troubled me not at all, for they were usually drab and dull-minded, but voices long silent spoke to me, and long-vanished scenes were created anew for me, because the actors in the drama of the Past peopled my world and allowed me to summon them at will.

I might have been different under happier conditions, but, looking back on a toboggan-like existence of ups and downs, I now realise that most of my mistakes

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are traceable solely to complete want of thought and judgment in my upbringing, and to ignorance of the naturally pliable and obedient mind of a child.

I left Boston House in the summer of 1888, and we had a wearing holiday in France. My stepfather was an indefatigable sightseer; but as he never allowed us to pause before the undraped in Art, our progress through picture galleries was a perpetual swoop solely upon scriptural and historical subjects.

We made our headquarters at Dunkerque, then a sleepy French town with all its troubles to come. I liked the great church, and I was interested in the statue of Jean Bart, although my stepfather would not discuss the hero's life-story with me. I asked whether, like Nelson, he had possessed an Emma, but Mr. Waterhouse refused to deal with the lapses of great men, and as Mamma at once said (she always did whenever an argument was started), "Oh, do let's sit down somewhere," the subject dropped.

I remember a delightful café in the Place Jean Bart, known as the Café des Nations, where we often lunched and dined. I wonder if it exists to-day, and what has become of the genial patron who gave Mamma the comic papers, with a deprecating glance in my direction and the whispered injunction, "Not for Mademoiselle."

Occasionally the spirit moved our untiring guide to convoy us over the desolate dunes, and a strange melancholy seized me when I surveyed the stretches of undulating sand. It seemed relentless as the sea from which it came: an invader, not a guardian of the Past like the hot Egyptian sand, which sings the Song of the Centuries as it drifts before the wind and lightly kisses the lips of the Sphinx.

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But the dunes of Dunkerque have to-day a glory peculiarly their own, since beneath them lie many of the brave dead who have fought for liberty and justice. Here is the last home of the fallen, a solemn God's Acre consecrated with the blood of martyrs whose spirits are numbered with the great cloud of witnesses, and whose bodies rest from their labours in this lonely spot of Northern France.

There were many stories concerning the dunes, and I remember walking over the site of the village of Zuydcoote, then deeply buried and all traces of its existence wiped out. It was strange to think that houses lay far beneath one's feet, and I wondered whether the inhabitants had been able to escape before the merciless sand engulfed their homes for ever.

At low tide the coast told a grim tale, for the blackened, weed-hung bones of many ships bore silent testimony of the tempests which had driven them helpless to destruction on these inhospitable shores. There were, also, patches of quicksand which stretched out murderous arms to drag the unwary into the dreadful depths below, and I always regarded these horrible places as the homes of monsters, a sort of Inferno of the Sea.

But the joy of the mirage compensated for the terror of the quicksands, and I saw a most perfect mirage during my visit to Dunkerque, when a large town, miles away, suddenly appeared, seemingly within an easy walk. I cannot conceive anything more curious than this phantom city, and it gave me quite an eerie feeling when I realised that it was only inhabited by the viewless forms of air.

After seeing the mirage I often wished that my stepfather could become one, as in this happy state

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we should possess the shadow and not the exceedingly undesirable substance which turned even a holiday into a penance.

I suppose that the wild voices of the wind and sea must have urged me on, but one evening I openly defied my stepfather for the first time. It was the close of a perfect day, the sky aflame with banners of crimson, and the setting sun turned the sands into a golden highway. I was wandering on ahead, dreaming of many impossible things, when my stepfather called upon me to stop.

“What latitude and longitude are we now in?” he demanded.

His tall, spare figure was a sinister silhouette against the flaming background, and as I looked at him fierce revolt seized me.

“I don’t know,” I said. “Listen, Papa; you shall not make my life so burdensome. It’s always the same. I’m in a cage—you’ve trapped me—and I’m something you don’t understand. I want affection, I want sympathy, not to be perpetually questioned. You are a common tyrant—you hate Mamma deep down and you hate me. We are slaves; but,” I added, “I shall be free one day, and then I will never speak to you or see you again.”

Mr. Waterhouse turned to Mamma, whose mind was occupied with other things.

“Mary—*did* you hear what Maude was saying?”

“What?” said Mamma, suddenly roused from happy dreams of French millinery. “Was Maude asking if it was safe to bathe?”

We walked back to the hotel in silence.

From Dunkerque we went to St. Omer, and I heard that I was to be left there in charge of my

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mother's old friend, Angela Brunet, until I should presently go to Brussels and finish my education.

I was so happy that I could have shrieked and danced and jumped; but I had now learned duplicity. I therefore appeared to be perfectly indifferent, as I knew that to show I ardently desired any particular thing always meant its non-attainment. I think I was scolded and told I was ungrateful, but I didn't care, and it was only when the train steamed away and left me behind that I felt I was safe to enjoy life.

Madame Brunet lived in a large house in the Rue de Dunkerque, and was the widow of a charming Frenchman who had died a couple of years before my visit. She and her sisters had known Mamma when they were children together, and the friendship was lasting. I was very fond of Madame Brunet, and the time I spent with her at St. Omer is one of the few jewels in my rosary of recollections.

The house was a combination of French elegance and English comfort, and I loved the quaint high-walled garden, with the old orangery and the odd little fountain. It was so pleasant to go out in the morning freshness and pluck the small sweet grapes from the vine which rambléd luxuriantly over the stable wall, and I used to admire the reddening leaves, and bring in great bunches to decorate the *salon*.

I was allowed to lead my own life, and I was quite happy. There was now no occasion to be deceitful in little things, because I knew that I was trusted and loved; but at first it seemed strange to realise I could practise my music without anyone looking at the clock to see when I started and if I left off exactly to the minute.

During this restful time I saw life with a better

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sense of proportion, and I came to the conclusion that Mamma did not really mean to be unkind; she simply didn't understand. Her senses, at first blunted, had afterwards become atrophied; she could not free herself from what I now termed "the cage," and so I looked upon her indifferent attitude towards me in a more charitable spirit.

St. Omer was a sleepy old place, and Madame Brunet and I were then the only English people living there. I have never forgotten its quaint charm: the fortifications which spoke of Vauban; the great gateway, over which two mechanical figures struck the hours on an ancient clock; and the ruined Abbey of St. Bertin, whose tall tower was a landmark as one approached the town.

I loved the cathedral, and I often sat and listened to the organ speaking to the echoing silences, whilst the heavy odours of incense drifted from the high altar. There was a strange stone figure close to the entrance, known as "The Great Stone God of T rouaine," probably some rude sculpture of Pan brought to St. Omer to rest for ever in the shadow of sanctity.

The country folk regarded the Stone God with mixed feelings of awe and terror, but they generally deposited their baskets in his keeping when they went to confess or to pray at one of the side chapels.

It so happened that one day an old woman from Hazebrouck brought a large basket of cakes which she hoped to sell in the market, and, thinking a little prayer to the Black Virgin of St. Omer might be propitious, she left her basket with the image from T rouaine, confident that it would, as usual, be quite safe. But, unfortunately, an excessively hungry sinner

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observed her action, and as soon as she was occupied with the Black Virgin he came forth, took the cakes, and—decamped.

“And now,” said the old lady, “having asked the Sainte Vierge to bring me good fortune, I go.” As she spoke she lifted the basket, which seemed curiously light. “Without doubt something *has* happened,” she added, peering under the spotless cloth as she spoke.

Then only was the dreadful truth apparent. The basket was empty! The horrified victim gazed wildly round the cathedral. It, too, was empty. Half beside herself with wrath, she turned her attention to the deity in whom she had placed her trust. “It is *you!*” she shrieked in a shrill staccato. “*You* miserable one! *You* glutton—*you* have eaten the cakes! Take this—and this—and this,” she added, belabouring the Stone God with her stout umbrella. “That’ll teach you to thief again. I always said you had no business here—and I was right.”

I wonder whether the great god Pan resented his image being wrested from the wild country which stretches untenanted under the canopy of heaven, where the little clouds come dancing from the dim distance, and if he ever stole silently into the town to see how it fared. Perhaps some startled priest has seen his hoof-marks in the morning or heard the plaint of his reedy pipes after the Angelus has hushed the world to stillness. But I have always pitied the Stone God. He is so far away from his environment; he cannot watch the moving sunlight and shadow, or see the young leaves unfolding, and hear the multitudinous voices of the country. The delicate smell of the warm earth after rain is not for him, and the close mustiness

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which clings of prayerful places is but a poor substitute; he is an exile from the pagan world, an alien in the company of saints, and I do not think that he finds much joy in his surroundings.

I was allowed to take long country walks chaperoned by a little great-nephew of Madame Brunet's; for a girl to walk out alone was unheard of in a French town. We used to go far beyond St. Omer, and ramble over the dyke-intersected country to where the mysterious Forest of Clairvaux met the meadows and changed the quality of the landscape. There was a peculiar charm about this wintry country, and we raced along the frost-bound roads, drinking deep of the cold air, whilst the ice crackled under our feet and the branches of the trees looked like delicate lace-work against the serene blue of the sky.

Then home to *déjeuner*, and afterwards out again, this time towards the hill country on the other side. One of our favourite walks passed the cemetery, and we always laughed at the sign, "*Aux derniers Adieux*," at the little *estaminet* where the mourners refreshed their drooping spirits after they had deposited the dead among the medley of masonry in the Town of Silence.

St. Omer has many interesting associations, and it was the birthplace of France's famous battle painter, Alphonse de Neuville, who so wonderfully portrayed the incidents of the Franco-Prussian War. I believe that at first the worthy family of bankers to which he belonged did not appreciate his art, and for some years, until fame came to him, de Neuville had a hard struggle for existence. However, he lived to achieve greatness, and after his death he was honoured by a street being called the *Rue Alphonse de Neuville*,

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but the imagination of St. Omer did not aspire to erecting a statue to his memory.

The famous Jesuit College is, of course, historical, and at one time many Irishmen of note, Daniel O'Connor included, were students there. The whole place seemed to live in the shadow of the past, and even the fashions were a couple of years behind. There were few shops, but when I was at St. Omer old furniture and bric-à-brac were to be picked up very cheaply, and I wavered for a long time between the choice of a letter of Robespierre's, a miniature of a girl, or a new hat, and the latter (to my shame) gained the day. I never ceased to regret Robespierre's letter, more especially as the hat didn't suit me a bit, and was a standing reproach to my taste whenever I looked in the glass.

I spent hours at the shop where I had seen the interesting letter from the "Sea-green Incorruptible," and the kind proprietor showed me many relics of the Revolution which had come into his possession. I chiefly remember a beautiful painting of the tragic "Belle Liégeoise," and there was some faïence from the Abbey of St. Bertin which originally bore the symbol of the lilies of France, but which had been defaced when the Revolutionists destroyed the church; the fleurs-de-lis were now almost obliterated.

As everyone except ourselves was French, I was obliged to speak the language if I wanted to make myself understood, and I speedily acquired fluent, if not grammatical, French. I used often to go into the bright kitchen at the Rue de Dunkerque and talk to the cook, whom we called Monsieur le Capable, and watch him deep in the mysteries of soup-making. He was a good-natured soul, with a powerful voice, and

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when he cut the vegetables he always sang the same song :

“ C’est la reine d’Angleterre
Qui est tombée par terre
En dansant le Polka
Au bal de l’Opéra.
Napoléon Premier
Vint la ramasser.”

Monsieur le Capable never finished the ballad when I was present, but wandered off into a ripple of “ Tra-la-la’s,” followed by

“ Malbrouck s’en va-t’en guerre,”

appropriately enough the popular song in these parts.

My pleasant days were now fast drawing to a close, as letters from home announced my stepfather’s advent to take me to Brussels. I was nearly eighteen, and this break in the educational treadmill had not reconciled me to the idea of serving a further sentence. I was desperately miserable, and although dear Madame Brunet tried to console me, I had the feeling that Brussels was to be a sorrowful experience and a place of bitter captivity.

In sheer desperation I implored my stepfather not to take me away ; I humbled myself metaphorically in the dust. It availed me nothing ! He had brought my school trousseau with him, everything was arranged, and my doom was sealed.

We left St. Omer in the late afternoon of January 31st, 1889. It was a cold, dark day, and driving snow and sleet swept past us as we waited for the Brussels express. I felt utterly lost, and my tears flowed unchecked. I crept close to my kind friend, who was very much affected, and Mr. Waterhouse walked up and down the platform like a sentinel on duty. At

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last we heard the distant roar of the express, it slowed down into the quiet station, we took our seats, and I leaned out of the carriage to bid a final farewell to Madame Brunet; then I sank back and sobbed. Gradually the grey afternoon became twilight, night fell, and we raced through the darkness upon the wings of speed. It was bitterly cold, and I was chilled to the bone when we arrived at Brussels. Mr. Waterhouse saw my luggage placed on a cab, and as he got in beside me he smashed the window with his umbrella, which jarred my overwrought nerves and made me cry anew.

The night air came in through the broken window as the cab jolted over the excessively stony streets, famous in Byron's verse, until we drew up outside a large house near the Avenue Louise. We alighted, the great *porte cochère* was opened, and we followed a maid to a *salon* adorned with many signed photographs of *débutantes* in Court finery. A slight woman rose to meet us, introduced herself as Madame T——, and, after a few commonplaces, suggested that I should go to bed immediately, as I looked tired out. I gladly availed myself of the offer, and my stepfather promised to come early the next morning to discuss educational arrangements, and to show me a few of the sights of Brussels.

CHAPTER VI

“ FINISHING ” DAYS IN BRUSSELS

THE morning after my arrival was cold and clear, with icy skies and a light powdering of snow underfoot. My stepfather came to the *pensionnat* soon after breakfast, and as we walked down the Avenue Louise I could not help admiring Brussels, although I felt very “strange” and miserable in my new home.

There seemed to be a kind of subdued excitement everywhere: people stood in little knots talking earnestly, and most faces wore a distinctly shocked expression. The Montagne de la Cour was crowded—in fact, there was no getting near many of the shops, and I wondered what had occasioned all the commotion, for it was very evident that something untoward had occurred.

Snatches of conversation reached me: “La pauvre Stéphanie!” “Quel malheur!” “Le Prince Héritier est mort avec la Baronne Vetsera.” What did it mean? Suddenly the crowd parted in front of a photographer’s; I pushed my way in, and then I saw that the window was draped in black, and displayed large photographs of a lady in Court dress, a handsome man in uniform, and the lovely, melancholy face of a girl in a very *décolleté* gown, whose neck and shoulders reminded me somewhat of my “Bacchante” at Harrington Square. The names under the photographs

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were those of the Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria, his wife Stéphanie, and the woman in the case—poor, ill-starred Mary Vetsera.

The news of the tragedy of Meyerling had just then burst upon Brussels, and although the married life of Stéphanie of Belgium had been notoriously unhappy, no one had anticipated its being terminated in this dreadful manner, and universal consternation prevailed.

Little I dreamed as I stood gazing at the likenesses of the actors of this sinister drama that, twenty-four years later, I should be called upon by the Countess Larisch (the niece of the Empress Elizabeth) to write her account of the tragedy and the part which she had played in the liaison of the Crown Prince and Mary Vetsera. I was a young girl of eighteen then, and much water had to flow under the bridges before a turn in the wheel of fortune made me a memoir-writer. I was first destined to throw off the bondage of fear and to face the world alone, and I had yet to discover that if many people are rogues, still more are liars. That morning I was but a girl whose future promised the uneventful life of the majority; I had no forebodings because I had no experience; of the wickedness of human nature I was in total ignorance; unsophisticated to a degree that might shame indeed the modern flapper of fourteen. No breath of the chill wind of disillusion yet had touched me. I gazed at the photographs and listened to the whispered remarks without noticing a hint of darker meaning.

“What does it mean?” I asked my stepfather.

“It is not a subject for *you* to discuss,” he said acidly. “People here speak openly of things which”—he was both severe and unctuous—“I am glad to

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say, can never be done in England. Please come away from that window."

I obeyed; and as we retraced our steps to the Avenue Louise my stepfather questioned me concerning my first impressions of the *pensionnat*. "It's very 'stuck up,'" I said ruefully.

"'Stuck up'?" I do not wish you to use slang expressions. What do you mean to imply?"

"I mean," I said desperately, "that the girls seem very grown up, and I think their people must be very rich."

"That's no drawback."

"Well, it may not be," I told him; "but my best frock isn't nearly as good as any one of the frocks the girls wore at breakfast this morning. I shan't be grand enough, I feel sure."

"You are not here to study dress, but to improve your mental capacities," observed Mr. Waterhouse, with an air of finality.

But I was right. I was not anywhere near the standard of riches and elegance always associated with the pupils of Madame. It was an ultra-fashionable school, and it rivalled the famous Miss Drury's in the number of aristocratic girls who were "finishing" their education within its walls. I had not mixed with this class before, and their topics of conversation were Greek to me. It emphasised my loneliness and isolation sharply.

I wished bitterly that I had been sent to a good convent school, where there were no class distinctions, and where everybody dressed alike in sensible serge! Here I was a dull grub amongst a cloud of brilliant butterflies, and I felt very much "out" of it.

I couldn't go to Hirsch's in the Rue Neuve and

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order expensive gowns, or buy dainty confections from Court milliners; neither could I say with confidence that I could join in the parties which were made up for the Opera, as I knew only too well that this form of extravagance would be vetoed at home, and it was one in which I positively dared not indulge.

It soon became the usual thing to hear, “Oh, it’s no good asking Maude Craven”; and, as schoolgirls can be the greatest snobs in creation, I was soon made to feel that I had no business to come to a smart school unless I was prepared to do as other people did. I made no single friend among the girls, and I occupied the thankless and unsatisfactory position of the looker-on who saw most of the game. At Boston House money spoke in whispers only; at Brussels it proclaimed itself with a shout. I was made to feel an outsider from the general life, and this hard selfishness of even young girls showed me a new and cruel standard. It bruised the sensitive temperament that indeed was mine. My disillusionment had begun.

So I led, in consequence, a rather solitary life, and can honestly say that I hated every hour of the time I was destined to spend at Brussels. I had not even, like Charlotte Brontë, the consolation of knowing an ideal professor. It was no fault of the school, which was excellent as a curtain-raiser for privileged girls before presentation and marriage; but for me the experience was unpleasant, and my existence was embittered owing to my distinctly false position.

I learnt singing with Mademoiselle Baudalet, of the Opera, and I feebly trilled Siebel’s song, “*Si le bonheur sourire t’invite,*” and another amorous ballad, “*Si vous saviez comment c’est triste.*” But although I had a good ear, my voice was not strong, and it could

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only be damned with faint praise as being "sweet." I had lessons in music from the great Belgian pianist, de Greef, whose rendering of Grieg I thought the most beautiful thing in the world; but my environment was absolutely antagonistic, and I could not settle down to take a serious interest in anything.

I had, however, one confidante called Madame Lafond, with whom I went out when the other girls were away at *matinées musicales* or expeditions "chez Hirsch." She was a dark, good-looking woman, and I discovered that she was not at all well off, and, in consequence, very glad to make herself useful as a sort of *dame de compagnie*. Madame Lafond sometimes took charge of the constitutional promenade down the Avenue Louise, and on these occasions we always encountered a tall, slight boy who wore glasses and walked between two officers. He looked rather grave and sad, and, judging from his appearance, I fancied he must be very studious. "Who is that?" I asked.

"That is the son of the Comte de Flandre," said Madame Lafond. I little thought that this grave-faced boy would in after years be known throughout the world as Albert, King of the Belgians, the monarch who refused to sacrifice his ideals of honour at the bidding of the High Priest of Kultur, and who alone saved France and England from being ground beneath the cloven hoof of Germany.

It would be interesting to know whether King Albert ever felt any foreshadowings of tragedy when he walked as a boy in the Avenue Louise! He certainly looked as if coming events had already begun to cast their shadows before, and the voice of Fate may have even then whispered of the martyrdom which Belgium was ultimately destined to suffer.

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I used to talk freely to Madame Lafond, and my complete ignorance of life vastly amused her. One day, as a beautiful carriage and pair drove slowly towards the Bois de la Cambre, she excitedly drew my attention to its occupant.

“Look—quickly! That’s Madame D——. She is a great *cocotte*.”

“A great *cocotte*!” I repeated. “What is a *cocotte*?”

“Oh, my dear Mademoiselle Maude, you must know what I mean—well, a *femme entretenue*.”

“I’m no wiser. Do tell me.”

Madame Lafond then explained at great length the position which ladies of easy virtue occupy in the social scheme, and I heard for the first time—luckily, from a woman’s lips—truths concerning the canker of immorality which eats deep into the heart of life. She told me that men are by instinct polygamous, and that many revel in a “home from home” existence, in which they are usually more generous to their mistresses than to their wives. The knowledge shocked and dismayed me. I had no idea that Love could ever be desecrated by Passion, but I had yet to discover that Passion is the most powerfully distinctive factor in life when once it takes complete possession of the soul.

“Oh, my poor innocent,” said my friend, who seemed so astonished at my ignorance that I think she almost doubted me, “it is easy to see that you have much to learn. Have you, then, no idea that men are generally unfaithful? If ever you love anyone, always remember someone else may love him and try and take him away from you.”

“Take him away! Why, surely no woman could be so wicked.”

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“Mademoiselle Maude, believe me, many women are men-stealers by inclination; and beware of them, for nobody is so merciless or so strong. Alas! I should know, since I lost Lafond through one of these horrors, and I am left, in consequence, almost penniless in this *galère*.”

She cried a little, dabbed some powder furtively on her nose, and we did not discuss men and morals further. I had heard quite enough.

The months dragged by with leaden feet, and I gradually sank into the apathy which usually reacts upon acute despair. I had only one pleasure at this time, for although I was unable to afford the Opera, I used often to go to the Théâtre Molière, in the Chaussée d’Ixelles, where Dumas was vigorously interpreted by a hard-working stock company.

I shall never forget those evenings in the stuffy, crowded little theatre, when I sat entranced at the story of La Tour de Nesle and the adventures of Buridan and Marguerite de Bourgoyne. The audience chiefly consisted of the *petite bourgeoisie*, who entered into the true spirit of melodrama and applauded the hero and hissed the villain with immense fervour. I especially remember the drop-curtain, which I fancy must have been the precursor of the more artistic advertisement curtain of to-day; but Art had no place in the Brussels advertisements, which were chiefly remedies for all the ills of the flesh and had a most extensive range from pills to hair restorers.

M. Jules Mary, the leading man (who, *par parenthèse*, greatly resembled Lewis Waller), played innumerable heroes, and he was the first man who ever attracted me. I fell desperately in love, with all the devotion of a modern *matinée* girl, but I only aspired

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to getting M. Mary to sign his name in my Longfellow Birthday Book.

“*Tiens, tiens,*” said Lafond; “an actor? They are not, my child, *grand’ chose* when they are out of the limelight. However,” she added, “no doubt he will be charmed to gratify your wish. So write and send him your book.”

I accordingly wrote a timid little note: “Would M. Mary give infinite joy to an English girl, and sign his name in her birthday book, which could then be returned to ‘M——,’ c/o the Poste Restante?”

That night I went to see *La Bouquetière des Innocents*, and all through the performance I wondered about the fate of my letter and the decorous birthday book. Never before had it wandered behind the scenes, and its names only comprised those of aunts, cousins, clergymen, and family friends. No actor’s autograph had ever flaunted across its stainless pages. Brussels was certainly responsible for more than my stepfather ever intended, I somewhat cynically reflected!

In the course of a few days we called at the Poste Restante, where, to my great joy, my book and a photograph awaited me. I was very pleased to think M. Mary had so condescended, and I wrote him a very heartfelt letter of thanks.

It was now early June, and my schoolfellows were dainty in pretty gowns of zephyr and silk; but, for the first time, I had no summer clothes. I wrote to Mamma and begged her to send me some cool frocks, but I only received an incoherent letter saying that she was worried and I must wait.

I was puzzled, as I knew no earthly reason why she should be worried, but I did not trouble her further. June passed, and the hot days of July made one long

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to be away from the city, deep in the heart of the country among the flowers and the trees. There was much pleasant discussion concerning the holidays, and one day Madame sent for me and told me she wished to speak to me.

"First," said I, "will you tell *me*, Madame, the reason why for some time past I have been so unkindly treated by you?"

"I do not think you have any right to say that, Mademoiselle Maude."

"But I say it again," I persisted.

"Well, since you will have it, I have been vexed—mark you, vexed—at the way in which your papa has behaved to me. Are you aware, Mademoiselle, that I have not received any money from him since your arrival here?"

I looked at her aghast. I cannot describe how I felt. At last I spoke, and my mouth was parched :

"No—no—surely you are mistaken?"

"There is no mistake," said Madame coldly ; "it is a fact that my bill remains unpaid—and I think it disgraceful that such a state of affairs could have arisen."

"For me? It isn't *my* fault—don't you understand how dreadful it all is?"

"You *must* have known something about it."

"I—why, I never suspected such a thing. I've always felt you disliked my being here, and I've *hated* and *hated* it, but I never knew until now the reason why you hardly spoke to me and why you looked at me so coldly. Let me go, Madame, let me go home—this evening—this very minute."

"You will *not* go until your account has been paid," she said quietly. "More—you will remain here

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after the other young ladies have gone away for their holidays, and doubtless your parents will soon relieve me of your charge.”

I broke into angry tears, I begged to be allowed to leave. It was of no avail, and I wrote an agonised letter to Mamma in which I described my interview with Madame.

I never waited for anything so anxiously as I did for my mother’s reply. At last it came :

“MY DEAR MAUDE,—It is quite true, but I think it was very unkind of them to tell you. Mr. Waterhouse says he has had business troubles. Uncle Joseph’s money is all gone. You will never be ‘presented’ or go out, as I had hoped. I do not know what will happen to us, and I am quite broken-hearted.”

And thus I knew that henceforth I must face a very different future from that which I had imagined would be my lot. I stared out into the deserted courtyard—I was quite alone, for the happy girls had left—and I realised the dreadful fact that I was virtually in pawn until something or somebody redeemed me.

I don’t know how I managed to live through those dreadful days of degradation. I hid myself like a hurt animal during the day, and I hardly ate or drank more than was absolutely necessary. I felt as if food eaten in this place of captivity would choke me, but I sometimes gratefully accepted a cup of *bouillon* from Madame Lafond. “Don’t be stupid, my poor child,” she said; “you are welcome to part of my *déjeuner*. I’m very sorry for you. Take courage—perhaps the good grandmother will come to your rescue.”

I shook my head, as I doubted exceedingly whether

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Grandmamma would be Christian-like enough to forgive my mother's treatment of her. But I was mistaken. One evening Madame T—— sought out my hiding-place. "Your account is fully settled by Mrs. Craven," she announced. "You are free to go home. Madame Lafond will take you to the station to-morrow morning. Good night, Mademoiselle Maude."

"Stop!" I cried. "I'm glad to go, for it has been like living in hell. I'm only a girl, and you've made me suffer for what was not, after all, my fault. I *hate* you!"

I ran upstairs and packed my box with feverish impatience—in fact, I threw my clothes in, helter-skelter. Nothing mattered if only I could get away. I hardly slept, and I was waiting ready dressed long before Madame Lafond came to fetch me.

It was a beautiful summer morning when I said good-bye to her and saw the last of Brussels for many years. I felt an immense bitterness within me, a wild revolt against the life I had hitherto known. As I reviewed the past I was frightened at the blows which Fate deals us poor helpless humans, who ask nothing better than to be left to live in peace. I only wanted a little love, a little sympathy; and both had been persistently denied me. I knew my faults, and how dangerous they would eventually become unless my better self triumphed; but who would help me in the struggle to do right? Alas! not at home should I find rest or happiness.

What had seven months' sojourn in Brussels done for me? What good purpose had it effected? Absolutely none. True, I could sing feebly and sweetly, I could play well, and I knew how to dress my hair and how to wear a hat at a becoming angle. But I had

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here learned my first lessons in worldly wisdom. I had opened my Pandora's Box of Experience, and I had seen, instead of the ills of life, all the dreams of girlhood escape. However, one friend remained—Courage—and I took her to my desolate heart and called her “Sister.”

CHAPTER VII

MY LAUNCH INTO THE WORLD

I RETURNED to England to find myself plunged into a veritable sea of troubles. Fair Lawn had been disposed of, and Mamma had taken a house close to Petersham Church, called Park Gate, which I had often passed when I was at Elm Lodge, not dreaming that I should ever live there.

Things were changed, but the most marked change lay in Mamma. She had hitherto accepted as gospel everything that Mr. Waterhouse chose to tell her, and she had browsed contentedly through life in the perfect belief that all was well. Now she was distinctly aggrieved, and, what was worse, she had become suspicious. To do her justice, Mamma imagined she had married a man who was the soul of honour, and to discover him otherwise must have been a bitter awakening.

She could not get any satisfactory explanation as to what had become of her money beyond being told that Mr. Waterhouse had speculated with it and lost it. "I was anxious to increase the capital," he said; and that was all she ever knew. She had given him full power to manage her affairs, and this was the disastrous result!

Mamma cried when she told me about the loss of our money, and I felt really sorry for her, as there is no worse fate than to be deceived after having trusted much.

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After my return to England I spent most of my time with Miss Holland, and I wrote a little pastoral play which was very much praised when it was produced in the gardens of Elm Lodge. A year passed, and I was constantly wondering what the future would bring forth, and at length I decided that it was impossible for me to remain quiescent. I felt I must work and make some kind of headway; my existence was now solely that of drifting with the stream, and it did not suit my temperament at all.

What could I do? My accomplishments would certainly have procured me a situation as a governess, but I knew that I did not possess enough patience to be a successful instructress of youth. I studied the advertisements, but I always seemed to be the kind of person for whom there was no demand, and I was beginning to despair of ever "making good" when one day an advertisement caught my eye: "Wanted.—A lady to assist an author in secretarial work."

"This," said I, "is exactly the very thing for which I've always longed," and I sat down and wrote an application for the post.

In a couple of days I received a reply to my letter. Would I call on Mr. Douglas Sladen, at 32 Addison Mansions, the following afternoon? I was so delighted that I could hardly contain myself, but I said nothing about what I intended doing. The habit of deceit had grown upon me since I returned home, for although Mr. Waterhouse had lost our money, he had lost none of his love of tyrannising over our lives.

"I'm going to Chiswick," I told Mamma, when she queried why I was wearing my smartest gown; and I hurried off, in anxious anticipation of the momentous interview.

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I always tell Douglas Sladen that he engaged me as his secretary because I looked neat, for most of the applicants who crowded the hall at Addison Mansions were loose-gowned and literary-looking, and we all eyed each other very suspiciously as we waited. At last my turn came to be inspected. A pleasant maid ushered me into a room crowded with books and pictures, and I sat down wishing desperately that the earth would open and swallow me up.

"So you are Miss Maude Craven," said a kind voice; and I looked up to see a gentleman regarding me with an amused smile. "I think, judging from your letter, that you are anxious to obtain work as a secretary. Have you had any experience?"

"No," I faltered; and then, taking my courage in both hands, "I wish you'd give me a trial—*everything* depends upon it."

Mr. Sladen laughed at the emphasis which I laid upon the word; and, emboldened, I continued: "I know French, and I love books, and I am not afraid of work. Do let me come."

"Well," said my prospective employer, "you seem very anxious. Girls of twenty are not usually 'out' for work. Are you an orphan?"

I was now no longer nervous, so I briefly explained the miserable existence which I was leading at home. "I somehow think you understand," I told him. "I can't go on like this—every day is the same; it is like an iron band holding me in; I can't breathe freely. I want to broaden my outlook and to get a grip on life. It's impossible to do this at home."

After we had discussed my capabilities and all the duties of a secretary, I waited anxiously to hear Mr. Sladen's decision.

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"I think I *will* give you a trial," said he. "By the way, do you know elementary Latin?"

"A little," I answered; "quite enough to help a child, if that is what you mean."

"Precisely. My son Charles goes to St. Paul's School, and I want you to glance over his lessons occasionally. I'm a very busy person," he added, "and you'll find your time well occupied. However, I hope we shall get on very well together, and I'm heartily glad to have finished with interviewing applicants. I've seen any number, but none was suitable. At last I only regarded them as incidents. Look here." He laughed and showed me some notes which made me think that the ways of authors were certainly rather eccentric.

The "jottings" were, however, not unamusing: "No. 3.—Miss H——. Tall girl, cotton gloves, loud voice. Useless. No. 5.—Miss D——. Big girl, clumsy feet, uneducated. NO. No. 8.—Scotch, with a heavy accent."

I could not help smiling at this odd way of recalling people to one's remembrance, and I was glad that I was now a secretary and not a number. "I'll do my best," I said gratefully.

"I'm sure you will," answered Douglas Sladen, in that impetuous boyish manner which he has never lost. "Come and start work this day week."

I almost flew down the staircase of Addison Mansions; in fact, so quickly did I return homeward that I might have been named Mercury instead of merely Maude. But it was only when I was crossing Petersham meadows that my spirits sank. Suppose I should not be allowed to go to London after all?

"Oh, but I must," I told myself. "I should like

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to live my 'crowded hour of glorious life.' It's surely better to wear out than to rust out." I stood for a moment looking at the peaceful river and the quaint little church I knew so well; the world was of no account here, for the reflection of the lights of London was never seen in the skies at Petersham. I could just discern the roof of Park Gate rising amidst the trees, and the smoke which curled lazily from its chimneys faintly pencilled the primrose sky. This signified that cooking was in progress, and if I didn't hurry I, like my father, would be late for dinner.

But as I passed the open door of the church something impelled me to enter. If I had been in the meadows of Thessaly instead of those of Petersham, no doubt I should have made offerings to the deities who controlled my destiny, for now Fate called me, and I have always followed whither she has beckoned.

I don't know exactly why I went inside Petersham Church, beyond having the impelling desire to invoke some kind of spiritual assistance. I sat down in the high pew, where in spring I loved to watch the laburnum trees in the churchyard dashing their golden rain against the ugly side-windows, and I appealed from the depths of my passionate undisciplined heart to become free and happy.

"I want to know the joy of life," I cried; but the dead mocked my words. The silence chilled me, but before I left the church I made my final supplication.

"O God—please let me go to Mr. Sladen's," I murmured wistfully as I slipped out into the fast-fading day.

I broached the subject that night, after I had warbled and played, as Mamma thought that "a little music" after dinner was necessary in every well-

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ordered home. My stepfather was reading *The Times*, and Mamma sat peacefully embroidering a sideboard cloth, when I suddenly twirled round on the music-stool and begged for a moment's attention. "I want to tell you something," I said; then paused, full of nervous apprehension.

"Well, Maude, we are waiting for you to begin," said Mr. Waterhouse impatiently.

"It's this . . . I'm going to be secretary to Mr. Douglas Sladen."

"And, pray, who is Mr. Sladen?" observed my stepfather, with much the same air as the judge who asked, "And who is Connie Gilchrist?"

"He's a famous writer," said I. And then the whole story of the afternoon's doings had to be told.

"And I thought you had gone to Chiswick," complained Mamma.

A tedious discussion ensued, and at length I gained my end, after many entreaties; but Mamma stipulated that she must interview Mr. Sladen herself, and see what manner of man he was and what sort of place I was about to make my home.

So in due course she went to Addison Mansions, and I have often wondered whether Mr. Sladen recalled her to his mind as a number or as a name! She expressed herself much pleased when she returned home, so my first essay to get my own living was made wonderfully easy for me after all.

And now I saw what life really meant to people with brains, and my "small smothered" past withered up completely when I discovered how little such lives as ours really mattered, and how utterly useless they were.

The things which seemed so important to us were

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looked upon as mere trifles in my new home; here there was no awful flood of futile small talk beginning with the weather and ending with politics. Mr. Sladen didn't tap a hideous barometer after breakfast to see if the "glass" was rising or falling; he looked at the open book of the heavens, and blessed or cursed the weather accordingly. He talked chiefly of books, people, and of all that makes up the joy and the colour of life. Music to him wasn't playing the piano and saying afterwards, "Thank you; very nice. What a pretty piece." He simply listened and said, "That's good," and it meant much more than the stereotyped acknowledgments to which I had hitherto been accustomed.

He told me of his long journeys in many countries, when the *Wanderlust* had seized him; and the cross-Channel trips about which I had boasted as "going on the Continent" became instantly hideously suburban and insignificant. Here was someone who brought the mystic East vividly before my eyes; and Douglas Sladen described to me all the exotic beauty of Japan, the fragrance of its lily-fields, and the unexpected dream-like charm of its gardens with the little stone bridges and the deep pools where goldfish dart like rays of living light. I stood with him, in imagination, upon the threshold of ancient temples, I marvelled at Buddha's inscrutable smile, and I saw the Sacred Mountain in all the glory of the sunrise.

As I fingered beautiful embroideries and revelled in their sensuous colourings, Douglas Sladen explained to me what symbolism meant, and I gradually learnt the hidden meaning of design. Later I became aware of the value of colour, and how one bit of it can strike the dominant note in any room; I realised that quality, not quantity, should be the chief incident in decoration,

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and when I had really grasped the fact I shuddered to think that I had ever lived with stuffed birds and steel engravings.

All my little conceits vanished when I discovered what an active brain my employer possessed. I had always imagined myself to be well read, but my reading was as nothing compared to Douglas Sladen's wide-embracing knowledge. And it was not superficial; he knew everything which he discussed equally as well as a connoisseur of port knows good wine, and he was always willing to help me to take advantage of his knowledge.

It is a great pleasure to acknowledge that I owe my first words of real encouragement to Douglas Sladen. He has always credited me with possessing a certain amount of occasionally misdirected ability, and he has always interested himself in my progress; indeed, he has never forgotten anyone to whom he has once extended the hand of friendship in the past.

Douglas Sladen has hardly altered in appearance during the twenty-four years which have elapsed since our first meeting, and I am convinced that this secret of youth is solely due to his inexhaustible capacity for getting the best out of life. Added to which, he has never suffered from "swelled head," so, unlike most successful writers, he can still be easily recognised after the flight of time.

I led a very happy life at Addison Mansions. I loved my work and I soon acquired vast stores of useful information; nothing was made a trouble, and Douglas Sladen showed me the greatest patience and consideration. I was fond of Mrs. Sladen and Charles, who was then a lovely little boy, exactly like Carlo Dolci's

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“ St. John the Baptist,” and I found the days only too short because I was so happy.

We spent the summer near Christchurch, where the Gleeson Whites were living, and I often used to go boating with Cicely Gleeson White, whom I never then looked upon as a future operatic star. It was delightful to drift on the lily-covered shallows of the Avon and to enjoy the cloudless days—so different from my former holidays, when pleasure was a toil. Small wonder, then, that amid these genial conditions I blossomed forth and became a fairly intelligent girl who was then tasting all the joys of youth for the first time.

I met Dr. and Mrs. Todhunter during my stay at Christchurch—charming, intellectual people; and it was Dr. Todhunter who discovered that I possessed a “ Greek ” throat, about which the Sladens teased me most unmercifully.

We explored every nook and corner of romantic Christchurch, but the monument to Shelley at the entrance of the Priory Church was the object which most appealed to my imagination in that beautiful building, although it fired all the old spirit of revolt within me when I heard why the poet was not permitted to have house-room with the more favoured dead inside.

It seems quaint that convention usually means so much, even in death. A man openly declares that he is a free-thinker and a free-liver, and he is condemned like Shelley to become an outcast; but the man whose morals are shamed by those of a tom-cat, and whose belief in goodness is nil, usually hides both so successfully during his life that he reposes in the most desirable spot in the cemetery, and has an expensive monument to mark the whereabouts of his invisible remains.

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This truth was once forcibly brought home to me when I was admiring a beautiful tomb in Brompton Cemetery, erected to the memory of a gentleman of assured position, but concerning whose private life history is discreetly silent.

"Fine grave *that*," said the genial policeman with whom I had been exchanging thoughts.

"Yes," I answered. "A very fine grave."

"'Ot stuff 'e was," remarked the representative of the law, apostrophising the departed.

"Well," said I, "it is perhaps a good thing that one cannot tell a bad man by his monument."

"Lor' bless you—yes," said my friend. "'E ain't the only rotter here by a long chalk." He waved an expansive hand in the direction of the multitudinous monuments. Then, lapsing into sporting vernacular: "No, 'e ain't alone 'ere," he said with decision. "Others 'also ran.'"

CHAPTER VIII

A NEW WORLD

WE returned to London early in September, and I made the acquaintance of Miss Norma Lorimer, who was then staying at Addison Mansions. I remember that my first impression of her was one of whole-hearted admiration; she was older than myself, strikingly pretty, with beautiful golden-brown hair, the brightest of blue eyes, and an almost magnetic charm when she chose to exert it. In those days she had not commenced her successful career of a novelist, but I somehow felt she would go far, as she was a shrewd observer of human nature and she also possessed an appreciative sense of the dramatic values of life.

Miss Lorimer had travelled in the East with the Sladens, and she was at this time greatly interested in all things Japanese. I chiefly remember her as I used to see her at breakfast, wearing an apple-green kimono embroidered with pink blossoms, looking the embodiment of health and happiness, and in my mental picture gallery she is called "The lady of the apple-green kimono."

I think it must have been about this time that Mr. Sladen's famous "At Homes" began to be so much discussed, and everybody who was anybody flocked to the interesting réunions at Addison Mansions. The spacious flat was admirably constructed for receiving

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a crowd, and the Japanese and Moorish Rooms, which communicated with each other, formed most effective backgrounds for the many fair and celebrated stars of literature who twinkled so brightly on these occasions.

I well remember my first meeting with Richard Le Gallienne, and I was much interested in his artistic personality. As he sat under the shaded lamplight in the Japanese Room I thought he must surely be a re-incarnation of the Shelley whose outcast monument at Christchurch had so excited my anger and pity. This young man possessed the delicate features of Harriet Westbrook's lover, the same gravely beautiful eyes, and the graceful poise of the head and shoulders peculiar to most pictures of the poet.

We discussed many things, and if Le Gallienne talked with the idea of impressing me he certainly succeeded, for his imagery and grace of conversation made my senses swim. I had never before heard poetry in ordinary conversation, and I felt as though I were in another world, that world of dreams whose gates had hitherto been closed to me.

Whenever I have heard Richard Le Gallienne described as a *poseur*, I have always said that he poses so unconsciously as to seem absolutely natural, and that is, after all, surely the most successful form of Art. In my opinion every picturesque personality should study pose, as, if it is well carried out, it embellishes existence, and makes dull dinner-parties and depressing receptions all the brighter for its presence.

Richard Le Gallienne introduced me to "Jimmy" Welch, who, although not then the successful "Sir Guy de Vere," was just the same charming, unaffected person that he is to-day; I remember we discussed the supernatural, which has always interested me, and I

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told Le Gallienne and his friend about a strange dream which had come to me on the 31st of every October for many years.

In this recurrent dream, having been tried for a crime and condemned to death, I experienced, with the utmost vividness, all the horrors of the scaffold. I saw the waiting headsman, the grooved block, and the ghastly basket of sawdust. I felt my eyes bandaged, light became darkness—I waited—and the scroll of my life unrolled before me. Then came the dull, agonising blow, and I awoke.

Richard Le Gallienne was of opinion that this scene of the past was enacted either to stimulate my memory or else to serve as a warning. “Jimmy” Welch said briefly the one word, “Indigestion.”

We all laughed, and when I bade Le Gallienne good night I promised to come and have tea with him at his rooms in Staple Inn. Douglas Sladen never minded my accepting invitations extended to me by his friends, for he knew full well how much I appreciated the wider life which I was now leading, and how grateful I felt to him for his share in bringing it about.

The “At Homes” were a revelation to me, as I had never participated in any gaieties worth mentioning. True, I had been with Aunt Eliza to a reception given by the Mayoress at the Pavilion, but the people I met now were vastly different from those I had known at Brighton, and the contrast was almost overpowering. The pretty women who came to Addison Mansions wore flowers tucked carelessly in their gowns, just as if they had picked them up and put them there as an afterthought. How different from the spray of tea roses which was securely stitched on the shoulder of the white gown that I wore at the Brighton

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reception! I remember how carefully the stalks were hidden in stiff silver paper, every leaf was wired, and even the delicate hearts of the roses were pierced to "keep them in position."

I also recalled the Brighton toilettes, all well made, all the same style, differing only in the quality of the materials, and I compared them with the out-of-the-ordinary garments worn in this new world where I was now privileged to live. Here were contrasts in colour so strong that they became harmonies, beautiful embroideries, and odd, fascinating, fairy-like jewels which I had never before even heard of or imagined could exist outside the Kingdom of Romance.

The people with whom I was brought up purchased diamonds because they were good investments, and also because they looked well to wear when paying calls or receiving callers. I don't think the coldly beautiful stones attracted them in the least; a "nice pair of earrings," or a "half-hoop" ring of an approved expensive pattern, amply sufficed for their artistic requirements.

Whereas now I saw the blue glow of scarabs, the treasure of gold hidden in the heart of amber, and the cool loveliness of jade called upon to lend their mysterious enchantment to woman's grace and beauty; and when I remembered the Mizpah lockets of my childhood, and the silver bangles with the snake's head fastening, I marvelled that I had ever worn such ugly trinkets.

People in London talked of the world and what was happening in it, and they discussed real people—not the servants, vicars, and curates who danced, marionette fashion, on the stage of the puppet show which I had hitherto imagined represented Life.

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Diseases, death and doctors were rarely mentioned at Addison Mansions; if one felt bilious, it was referred to casually as "not being just the thing," whereas in my old home bile and its unlovely causes provided the topic of conversation for a week.

It was all different, and no adventurer who sailed for El Dorado had ever half the joy which was mine when my prim little barque was launched on the deep waters of literary and artistic life.

I went to Staple Inn as I had promised. It was the first time that I had been to tea alone with a man—surely another step along the pathway of enlightenment. I remember that I looked rather well in a lovely cloak lined with flame-coloured silk, which Miss Lorimer's discerning eye had decided would suit me when I admired it at John Barker's. As it is permissible to mention the snows of yester-year, I may say that I was then a very pretty girl, for had not Richard Le Gallienne told me so!

"You have not the air of belonging to this world," said he, looking curiously at me. "You might well be one of the alluring, wicked dead—a vampire. Yes, it is the vampire that you resemble."

I was rather flattered at being compared with a vampire, and I watched my host with deeper interest. It seemed so strange to see a man pouring out tea, and to hear him asking if I took sugar and milk, and whether I liked my tea strong or weak. In the land whence I had wandered men only handed cups and cake, and said, "May I have another cup of your *delicious* tea"—they never attempted to *pour it out*. Here everything seemed to be reversed, and I wondered whether ideas concerning love and marriage were topsy-turvy as well.

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“And I believe you come out of your tomb every night, and steal the hearts of men,” continued the author of “The Quest of the Golden Girl.”

This statement recalled me to earth, and I laughed, because I suddenly thought how shocked Mamma would have been at the suggestion that anyone ever emerged from the tomb except to answer the roll-call at the Day of Judgment. But for *her* daughter to be thought capable of leaving the family vault, not even to revisit *the home*, but to steal the hearts of men—well, no words were adequate for the situation. I laughed again. “Oh, Mr. Le Gallienne,” said I, rocking with mirth, “I don’t really think I’m at all that sort of person.”

Later, when we discussed families, the poet saw my point of view. “I shall put you in a story, nevertheless,” he told me (he afterwards wrote about a Vampire Woman in Phil May’s Annual); “for you are certainly a vampire, you’re only disguised as a secretary to suit yourself.”

I thoroughly enjoyed that afternoon, and I met Richard Le Gallienne many times afterwards. I think he is one of the most exquisite writers the present age has produced, and the best test of his genius lies in the fact that, even after being stripped of its affectations and little conceits, the quality of his prose and poetry remains pure gold.

The name of my Shelley-like friend recalls to my memory that of John Lane, who often came to Addison Mansions. I always think he is one of the most courteous people I have ever met, and quite one of the most intellectual. John Lane thoroughly deserves all his success as an enterprising publisher, and the reading public owes him a great deal of gratitude for

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the original and interesting books which bear the imprint of The Bodley Head.

I met many well-known people at Addison Mansions, but to talk about them in these pages would be something in the nature of a *réchauffé* of the names already mentioned by Douglas Sladen in his admirable book, "Twenty Years of my Life." I can honestly affirm that this period of work was invaluable to me, and I only wish I had been allowed to stay longer at Addison Mansions. But Fate suddenly tapped me on the shoulder and ordered me to return to my home, which I now looked upon more than ever—especially after this taste of freedom—as a cage.

The autumn of 1891 was damp and melancholy, with mists that hid the sun, and heavy rainstorms that swept away the lingering spirit of summer. I had a troublesome cough, and I became so pale and thin that Douglas Sladen wrote to Mamma and told her that I had better see a doctor.

Mamma, who was somewhat alarmed, came to London at once, and carried me off to a specialist, who, without mincing matters, informed her that, in his opinion, I was on the verge of a rapid decline.

"It may be," said he, "merely some development of the old constitutional trouble, but your daughter must leave London, and winter either on the Riviera or somewhere on the South Coast."

This unexpected verdict completely upset Mamma; she was certainly sorry for me, but she was absolutely panic-stricken as to the manner in which my stepfather would receive the nature of my illness. "Something will have to be managed," she wailed when she bade me good-bye at Addison Mansions. "I'm sure I don't know what I have ever done to be worried so. You must

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have worn thin shoes and got your feet wet, or else I dare say you have sat in a draught, but you are so obstinate that it is no use saying anything. One thing is certain, if you get well you won't be allowed to take up outside employment again; you must stay at home and make yourself useful in the house."

I slipped indoors unobserved, and went to my own room, speechless with misery, raging with anger against Fate. I knew Mamma meant what she said, and that I should be securely caged after this unlucky ending to my first flight. I felt heartbroken at the idea of leaving the kind people who had filled my days with happiness, and I rebelled against being forced to give up my all-absorbing work. It seemed so hard of God not to allow me to lead a useful life, and like many another desperate unhappy soul I wildly questioned the wisdom of the Creator. I could not, like a good Christian, accept all the blows from Heaven sitting down! I had been told that those especially favoured by the Almighty were often and severely chastened, but I was very young, and my sinful and undisciplined nature was not appealed to by this proof of the Divine love.

However, the stars in their courses fought against me, and one November day I bade farewell to Douglas Sladen. I was miserable beyond words, for I knew that I was leaving much behind when once his hospitable door had closed upon me. I can never express enough gratitude to him for the part he played in my intellectual development, and I owe to the early influence and encouragement of Douglas Sladen much of the success which has come to me in later life. I returned to Petersham, ill, despondent and rebellious, and I listened with deep dismay to the programme which had been arranged for me.

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“Your grandmamma is going to bear the expenses of your illness; but, of course, Maude, they think at Brighton that you never could have worn enough flannel,” said Mamma, finishing in slightly aggrieved tones.

“Well, where *am* I to go?” I asked anxiously, ignoring the subject of flannel. “Do say it’s somewhere on the Riviera where I can see the blue skies and the flowers; the doctor *did* mention the Riviera, didn’t he?”

“You are not going to the South of France,” interposed Mr. Waterhouse. “With that utter disregard for the convenience of others which you have always displayed—you have not taken *me* into consideration. How could I possibly come to the Riviera every week-end?”

“Are you coming for the week-end *wherever* we go?” I said in despairing accents. “Then I suppose the choice of the place rests with you alone!”

“I ask you, Mary,” demanded Mr. Waterhouse, “to tell me exactly what you think of this ungrateful girl, who, whilst almost standing on the brink of eternity, has the impertinence to question my judgment. If I did not know otherwise, I should say she was malingering.”

“Oh,” replied Mamma, anxious for peace at any price, “I don’t think Maude is shamming; her father never *looked* ill—in fact, nobody believed his health had been so bad until I said, ‘Well, William must have been ill, because he’s *dead*.’”

I smiled; it seemed so inconsiderate of anyone to die without a more or less distressing illness and the ghoulis details which appeal to the sentimental imagination of so many families.

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"Well," said I recklessly, "please will you tell me where I *am* to die."

"Maude's levity borders upon profanity," remarked my stepfather, addressing an unseen audience; then turning to me: "If it should please God to take your unrepentant soul, you will pass away at *Worthing*."

"*Worthing!*" I repeated, as the horrible memories of my childhood awoke; "*not Worthing*—oh, please—*please* do let me die somewhere else."

"What a fuss to make!" said Mamma very crossly; "why, it's not far from Brighton and London. There is a fine sea front, and you can go out in a bath chair and listen to the band. I'm sure it's very nice."

I was silent. Again depressing memory rose before me, shooting poisoned arrows deep into my unhappy heart. It was so cruel, so dreadful, and I was now utterly helpless in the hands of my captors (for so I designated those who controlled my destiny).

If I was really very ill, I argued to myself, why wasn't I allowed to be comfortable *in extremis*? Why couldn't Mamma assert herself and say, as I knew I should have done, "This is *my child*, I shall cling to her, and if she is doomed to die she has at least the right to be happy."

I made no further comment upon what I absolutely hoped was to prove the last stage of my short pilgrimage. I regarded my illness in the light of a great deliverance, because I had experienced the truth that "many things are sad, but death is not the saddest." To be perfectly just, I have no doubt that I annoyed my family equally as much as they annoyed me, but I was one of Nature's mistakes, a creature who had been placed in the wrong environment and who actively

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resented it. It was impossible for ever to excite or to obtain sympathy; my long periods of silence were termed "sulks," and my flashes of revolt "bad temper," but in my case the tragedy of mutual misunderstanding was destined to bring about a sudden and unexpected *dénouement*.

I had not seen Worthing since the day, twelve years previously, when I had wandered away in search of Grandmamma, and I found it almost unchanged. Luckily the weather was favourable, and I spent most of the day drinking in the life-giving sea air and watching other invalids who thought, like myself, that Worthing represented the last hope for those afflicted with consumption.

In the evenings I sat by the fire and read, whilst Mamma wrote bulletins to Brighton and reports of our daily doings to Mr. Waterhouse. My stepfather came down every Saturday to Monday, but we hardly spoke to each other, as our slumbering dislike was fast merging into openly declared hatred. Thus the days slipped away, and I seemed to be as one who listens expectantly for a summons. I sometimes heard the voices of the storm telling me of wreckage and death on the wind-lashed coast, and the house trembled and moaned in the grip of the tempest. But I was never afraid, and indeed I used to welcome the message of the untamed elements. The wings of the wind enveloped me, its wild breath swept the scales of discontent from my eyes, and it told me that I was to live and not to die, because I had yet to pass through many experiences and to eat my bread in strange places.

At last the winter passed, and spring returned to the earth. I was almost completely cured, and there was no occasion for us to remain away from home any

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longer. But the question, "What is to be my fate?" which I had asked myself so many times, still remained unanswered. I knew that I could never live at home; I had looked over the wall of life during my experience at Addison Mansions, and I now realised all that it meant. If, I argued, I was really as clever as Douglas Sladen imagined, why could I not turn my talents to practical account? Surely there must be many intellectual families who would not object to receive a girl as a paying guest. But the word "paying" sent my spirits down to zero. Who in all the world would pay for me to live away from home? Suddenly I remembered Grandmamma, and I decided to put my fate to the test, and "win or lose it all."

I accordingly went to Brighton one April afternoon, not long after my twenty-first birthday had passed without any of the rejoicings or gifts which usually mark one's majority. It was warm spring-like weather, with buds and birds everywhere, and a genial sun waking the slumbering world into life. I felt happy, as I had courage and confidence in myself, and I believed that Grandmamma would be inclined favourably to consider my request. I was not mistaken. After I had stated my case, she remarked: "Well, love, it is a little strange not to wish to live at home; your cousins would not dream of going away from Ilkley; why can't you be like other people?"

"Because I never shall be," I said bluntly. "Listen, Grandmamma. I'm like Papa; you know he was different from most men—'peculiar,' Mamma calls it. Well, I suppose I'm peculiar too. Give me my chance," I begged, kneeling beside her as I spoke, and taking her hands in mine. "Dear Grandmamma, do be kind; you loved me when I was a tiny child, love

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me and understand me *now*. I need affection so desperately."

Grandmamma looked at me rather sadly. "Eh? But you were always a wilful little girl. What would your grandpapa have said, I wonder. We must see what Aunt Eliza thinks about it."

Luckily Aunt Eliza, who was kindly disposed, did not discourage the idea, so I returned to Worthing in great spirits. I told Mamma, under the seal of secrecy, what Grandmamma had promised, adding, "Now all we have to do is to find some nice people with whom I can live, and you'll see how I shall get on. I know it won't be difficult; Douglas Sladen is certain to put work in my way."

She made no remark, beyond commenting upon my grandmother's generosity, and the subject dropped for the time, as we had arranged to retain our rooms at Worthing until the end of May. But my eyes were soon to be opened. One week-end my stepfather went alone to Brighton, and on his return he told me that all my plans for the future were absolutely at an end.

"I have seen Mrs. Craven," he said coldly, "and enlightened her as to the depravity which I fear has urged you to wish to live away from home. Directly your mamma told me of your intentions and how completely you had misled your grandmother, I considered it my duty to talk to her very plainly about you and your lamentable duplicity."

"So *you* told him?" I cried, looking at Mamma.

"Well, Maude, it wasn't quite *nice* of you to contemplate leaving home," she faltered. "I'm sure I didn't wish to cause a scene; if you and your stepfather can't agree, why speak to each other? You need only be polite at meals to prevent the servants talking."

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I took no notice. "You mentioned depravity," I said, turning to Mr. Waterhouse. "That's a *nasty* word; what do you mean?"

"*This* is what I mean," he answered, still critically regarding me. "When any young girl leaves home and insists upon living in London by herself, it follows inevitably that there is a lover in the background."

"Oh, you hateful, wicked man!" I raged (regardless of Mamma's frantic, "Come, come, Maude!"). "I've no lover; I wish I had, for then somebody would care for me. It's a lie, and you know it. Now, I suppose, Grandmamma believes *you*."

"Exactly, and she wishes me to inform you that no allowance will be paid you to live away from us. Mrs. Craven is fully aware as to the moral risk she would incur if she weakly yielded to your request, so she very rightly refuses to accept the responsibility. And now, Mary, go and put on your bonnet, as I shall ask you to walk with me to the station. I have exactly twenty minutes to spare."

My stepfather went over to the window as he spoke, and we stared at each other without speaking. The pleasant sunlight fell on his cold, impassive face, and I idly thought that he certainly warranted the epithet "gentlemanly" by which Mamma always alluded to him. He was very tall and upright, and he dressed with quiet good taste; indeed, some people would have called him a very distinguished-looking man. But his eyes were small and hard, and the heavy moustache and short beard effectually concealed a tell-tale mouth which would otherwise have betrayed the sensualist.

My stepfather never looked untidy, his clothes seemed to be moulded on him; and when other men were mud-bespattered on a rainy day, he alone con-

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tinued to remain spotless. He never failed to present that appearance called immaculate; there was steady calculation in everything he did as in everything he wore. His body, as his mind, betrayed a studied deliberation that denied all impulse or that generosity which is the child of impulse. I was ever fascinated by the way his shoes wore out—a man's feet are surely an evidence of character—the careful tread which allowed no excess of weight on one side or the other. The heels never wore down irregularly; they wore down evenly all over. Nothing in this man's thought-out method of living was miscalculated. He lied to Mamma with the same cold deliberation and vigilant exactitude that he wore his heels down.

Left alone, I lost control of myself and wept unrestrainedly. All my better feelings vanished, and I became obsessed with a desire for revenge on this merciless man who had hurt my soul ever since I had known him. I decided that, come what might, I would never return home—but where was I to go, and what was I to do? I knew this fresh flight would, of necessity, sorely try my wings, and that I must fix upon some course which would prevent the possibility of my ever being brought back. In no other life should I be safe. I must seek sanctuary in the wide world, in that London who opens her arms to the young and deceives them with her specious promises.

How could I cut myself off most effectually from my old surroundings? I sat for a long time and wondered what desperate deed I must accomplish before I crossed the Rubicon and left my smouldering boats behind me. Suddenly I sprang to my feet—the knowledge at last was mine. “I'll go on the stage,” I announced to the empty room, “and I'll run away!”

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Thus my decision was made, and I knew I could expect no forgiveness.

The stage in those days was vastly different from what it is now, and people were still old-fashioned enough to look upon it as being rather improper. I had heard even very celebrated actors described as "persons" by my relations, and if well-known Thespians were thus casually dismissed from well-regulated minds, what should I be called? I pondered—and then, written on the opposite wall in letters of fire, I saw the words, "*A disgrace to the family.*"

I was outwardly calm again by the time Mamma returned, and she never imagined the ordeal of emotions from which I had emerged. I managed to talk quietly about the future, and taken completely off her guard, she told me all that I wished to know.

"Your grandmother's allowance will make things much easier at home," she said placidly.

"Her allowance?" I queried. "Are you, then, to be paid for keeping me? So it was the money, not the 'lover,' which really mattered to Mr. Waterhouse?"

"I shan't discuss things with you, Maude, if you are so rude; I really don't think your friendship with literary people has improved your manners."

I was up in arms at once. "My literary friends are the kindest people I've ever met," I retorted.

"Mr. Waterhouse says that novelists and poets are generally very lax in their morals," answered Mamma gravely. "He was telling me about Georges Sand as we walked to the station, and I was really quite shocked at the history of her life. I'm very glad you are out of that unconventional set if it encourages women like her."

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I somewhat grimly reflected that in many cases ignorance was indeed bliss, and Mamma continued: "To-morrow I am going back to Petersham for a few days, and I shall leave you here. You won't be lonely, will you?"

"Oh, no; I'll manage to amuse myself," I said lightly, but my heart beat faster because I knew it was during Mamma's absence that I should be obliged to make my escape.

I said "good-bye" to her the next day with very mixed feelings. The better-natured Maude wanted to tell all and beg forgiveness, but the new Maude, with the hard eyes and the set lips, counselled—and kept silence. Left in sole possession I hastily decided upon my plan of campaign. I had a sovereign in my purse, quite enough to take me to London, and once there I had absolute faith in my chances of falling on my feet.

That evening I packed most of my clothes, and informed the landlady, when she brought my supper, that, profiting by Mamma's absence, I was going to spend a couple of days at Brighton. "Call me early," I said, unconsciously quoting "The May Queen," and then it dawned on me that the morrow would indeed be the "maddest, merriest day," and I smiled bitterly as I realised what my flight might mean to me in after-life.

It was a warm, cloudless day when I left Worthing; my departure had been perfectly well ordered, and I showed no traces of the inward excitement which consumed me. It was only when the train was nearing London that fear, cold and deadly, gripped me, and I became afraid of life for the first time. I seemed suddenly to have become so young and so friendless, and, terrified at the prospect of the Unknown, I almost

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made up my mind to jump out at Clapham Junction and return to the family fold. Suddenly I braced up my shivering nerves. "Oh, Maude Craven, you're not worth *anything!*" I angrily rebuked my cowardly spirit who had dared to oppose this great adventure. "You are running away, you *can't* go back to slavery; don't spoil everything by losing your courage at the last moment."

I sat up, very erect and stern. The train stopped at Clapham Junction, but I remained immovable. At last we reached Victoria—a porter opened the door of the compartment, and his words, "Any luggage, miss?" brought the fact forcibly home to me that I was indeed a runaway.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAND OF BOHEMIA

“TAKE my luggage to the cloak-room,” said I, and I followed the porter down the platform. A sudden inspiration had decided me what to do next: I would go to Sir Benjamin Baker, tell him the whole story, and ask his assistance and advice.

Queen’s Square Place is not far from Victoria, and my spirits rose directly I found myself outside the station. I felt, truth to tell, a little frightened and bewildered, but I hurried along, thinking that now I was one of the great hive of workers, all bent upon extracting, if not the sweetness, at least the daily bread from life, and I determined to be equal to the best of them.

I experienced no difficulty in seeing my father’s friend. “Please say that Miss Maude Craven is here, and would be glad if Sir Benjamin Baker would see her for five minutes,” I told the head clerk, and was at once shown into Sir Benjamin’s private room.

“Well, Miriam,” said he, as I advanced to where he sat at a bureau covered with documents and papers. “What brings you to London this beautiful morning? Shopping?”

“No,” I answered; “I’ve run away, and I want to tell you about it.”

“Phew!” Sir Benjamin whistled softly. “That’s an alarming statement! Why have you run away?”

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I told him, and he listened attentively without interrupting my tale of many woes. Then he said rather gravely: "Now, Miriam, I'm going to talk to you very plainly. I'm not going to let you take such a headlong plunge as this without warning you that you will find the world equally as hard and unsympathetic as your home. But you are far safer there than you will be in London. Do you understand what it means for a girl to struggle alone against life?"

I explained that I had already weighed everything for and against the adventure, and I felt that bodily starvation would be preferable to the slow starvation of the soul which I had undergone. "I dare say I shall suffer," I said, "because occasionally I have a curious feeling that I shall never be a happy woman; but I'm young now, I've a right to make a bid for fortune. Anyhow, it would be impossible to live at home after this; I've already written and told Mamma that I've gone—never to return."

"And where do you propose living?" asked Sir Benjamin.

"I thought I would go to the house at Haverstock Hill where Mamma took me after Papa's death," I replied. "I know Miss Burgess still takes ladies as paying guests, and I should certainly not be able to get into mischief there. But I've no money, and I want you to be very kind. Will you lend me some until I can get work?"

"I can easily let you have the money," answered my friend, "but I cannot so easily reconcile my conscience to aiding and abetting you in this escapade." He reflected deeply for some moments without speaking, while my fate hung in the balance. Then his face cleared suddenly. "Your mind seems to be made

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up," he continued, "and perhaps if I don't help you something might happen to you which would make me regret not having done so. Look here, Miriam, I'll give, not lend, you twenty-five pounds on the condition that, if you cannot make any headway, you will promise to eat humble pie and go home again. Is it a bargain?"

I could not answer him. The kind words touched me profoundly and stirred some feeling within me almost akin to pity for myself. It was decided at that moment, I knew, that I was henceforth to live my life apart, and that I was to suffer through the very emotions which I now so longed to fill my soul—"those things which, in all my endless days, I have found not, nor shall find."

If the veil of the future had been lifted as I stood trembling upon the brink of my fate, I should have seen that I was destined in after years not to be the friend of beings whose lives are wreathed with happiness. Those whom I loved and who loved me were to be spirits in prison, rebels like myself, and we were to taste the dregs of sorrow and drink deeply from the cup of disillusion. I have much to regret, but I think I have always been one of those who "hunt and fight through life among forms vanishing in the forest and voices calling from stormy headlands amid the rain." I felt, like them, as if a spirit always urged me to return to a simpler, wilder existence which I had led in older days, and that I was now one of the "worshippers who have outlived their god."

At last I beat off the black wings of thought.

"I've got to do this," I cried; "I *feel* it—I'm driven by something which I don't understand. Sir Benjamin, I will give you the promise you have asked,

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and I'll endeavour to be true to myself and to my ideals."

He smiled, still gravely, and handed me a cheque, saying as he did so: "I hope I haven't signed your moral death-warrant."

"No—no," I interrupted. "Dear Sir Benjamin. . . . Can't you understand . . . it's my passport to Life."

I bade him a somewhat subdued good-bye. It was now past noon, so I hurried back to Victoria, collected my luggage, and told the cabman to drive me to Haverstock Hill.

"Anyhow," thought I, "if Miss Chrissie won't have me, I'm not penniless; and, as I'm twenty-one, Mr. Waterhouse can't drag me forcibly back to Petersham." However, I was not denied admittance to the home I had known as a little girl. I explained the position just as I had done to Sir Benjamin Baker, and it was soon arranged that I should wait at Haverstock Hill, Micawber-like, for "something to turn up."

"You must write at once and let your Mamma know you are safe with us," insisted my old governess; so I sent a short letter which, I hoped, would allay any anxiety concerning me and my doings.

Two days afterwards the thunders of Zeus burst over our heads. Mr. Waterhouse absolutely ignored me, and wrote telling Miss Chrissie "to take Maude Craven to Victoria on the following morning, and see her off by the Brighton express—strictly in charge of the guard."

"I'm afraid you must do as he wishes," remarked Miss Chrissie.

"Never," I said; and I at once telegraphed to my stepfather two words: "Not going."

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He took no notice, and for a week he daily commanded that I should be dispatched to Brighton. At last I wrote stating that, as I was now of age and legally a free agent, I absolutely refused to return either to Brighton or to Petersham.

“I did not wish to cause pain to my family,” I continued, “but I have long felt it was impossible to continue leading my former life. I want to work, and I do not intend being a burden upon Mamma any longer.”

Mr. Waterhouse replied that, if I seriously meant what I said, I must consider myself to be henceforth an outcast. He could not, of course, prevent Mamma from writing to me or even from seeing me, but, speaking for himself, he never wished to set eyes on me again.

I acknowledged this ban of excommunication again in two words: “*Thank you.*”

I now settled down to a rather monotonous life, but I was not unhappy. I sat under the pear-tree in the long garden, where I read or worked as the mood seized me, and occasionally I went to the open spaces of Hampstead Heath, where I could think undisturbed. I had need to think, because, after all, twenty-five pounds would not last for ever, and I was rather at a loss to know how I should ever manage to obtain an engagement at a London theatre. I had neither great beauty nor influence to make smooth the road for me, and I was fully aware that I possessed no particular histrionic gifts. However, I had made up my mind to go on the stage by hook or by crook, and, as my stepfather would doubtless have remarked—the Devil blessed the enterprise.

June, July, and August passed uneventfully.

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Thanks to Miss Burgess, I was fortunate enough to meet some wealthy Americans from Kansas City who wanted a young lady to speak French and to travel with them for a few weeks in Switzerland. I offered my services, and we straightway rushed off to the mountains, first via Paris to buy clothes. It was not an unamusing experience, and I now realised what a power money is in the world. These people bought exactly whatever they fancied, regardless of what it cost, and they tired of jewels and gowns much as children tire of their toys. They never stayed long enough thoroughly to explore the beauty of any place; they rushed through Switzerland at express speed, and they came back to England breathless.

"Say, Gertrude," remarked Mr. H—— one morning, "I guess Kansas City has forgotten us since we've been running around. It's just time to give them a livener."

He straightway went out and cabled that Mr. H——, the well-known citizen of Kansas City, had dropped down dead at Bâle. "*That'll* make them talk," said he. It *did*. He had the pleasure of reading his own blatant obituary notices, and also of contradicting the report, which afforded an opportunity for him to mention casually that he and his wife were making an extended tour in Switzerland, and that Mrs. H——'s pearls and exquisite toilettes were the talk and envy of feminine Lucerne.

The H——s sailed for America in October, and I returned to Haverstock Hill with the greater part of my generous salary intact. I had been photographed in Paris, and I sent a copy to Drury Lane Theatre, expressing the hope that it might serve later to introduce me to pantomime.

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Whether my letter was quaint or whether my photograph was attractive, I cannot say, but one or the other procured me an answer. Soon afterwards I received a summons to Drury Lane Theatre tersely printed on the back of a post card, and I was especially enjoined to bring the card with me when I presented myself at the stage door.

I shall never forget the morning when I first entered the Land of Bohemia. Miss Chrissie and I had anxiously deliberated what was most suitable for me to wear, and, as black suited me in those days, I fixed on a little serge skirt, a soft silk blouse, and a rather pretty black hat. Excitement had given me a becoming flush, and I was very pleased when my friend said: "You *do* look nice, Maude; I'm sure you'll be successful."

After a good deal of trouble I found the stage door, where old Freeman and his cat were such familiar figures for many years. He was a rather gruff-voiced Irishman, with the eye of a martinet and the temper of a golfing colonel, but he was a great character and he possessed a really kind heart under a decidedly severe exterior. I believe I am right in saying that the name of the big striped cat was "Peter," and he was almost as autocratic as his master. He rarely allowed himself to be stroked, but lay stretched out on the top of the wooden partition inside the stage door, whence he surveyed the entrance of Beauty with a sour eye. Peter occasionally unbent and crooked a curious paw towards feathers or flowers which waved in his direction while the wearers signed their names in the "attendance book," and I think deep down that Peter was in reality as *blasé* as most people are who have had long experience behind the scenes.

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"Go inside," commanded Freeman, when I timidly asked him what I was to do. Accordingly, I pushed the swing door, and found myself enveloped in a sort of twilight which seemed to smell and taste of dust. I looked around me: this dim desert was Drury Lane! The great stage was dotted here and there with little groups of girls talking and laughing together, and I felt as if I had just arrived at a new boarding-school. Suddenly I heard someone speaking to me. "Do you know why we have had a 'call'?" said a pretty, fair girl standing beside me.

"No," I replied; "this is all new to me." We soon became confidential, and the pretty girl told me that her name was Kate Marshall, and that, like me, she had not been to Drury Lane before. "I've played in *Blue-eyed Susan*," she said, "but I thought I'd try panto. this year for a change, although I don't make a good boy; I'm too short for tights."

My new acquaintance was very pleasant, and I cast admiring glances at her well-cut coat and skirt, smart hat, and high-heeled shoes. I did not then know that this chance meeting would eventually bring about great changes in my life, and that, years afterwards, Kate would introduce me to Mr. Eveleigh Nash, the publisher, who has played the part of guide, philosopher and friend to me during my literary career.

"Come along," said Kate, as we noticed the chattering crowd fast disappearing through a door near the wings; "we'd better follow them." We pressed up a narrow staircase until we found ourselves in a room where two men were talking to some of the girls, whilst others were signing what appeared to be printed forms. At last our turn came. I showed my card, and it was examined by a good-looking man

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with a clever, cynical face, whose name I discovered later to be Arthur Collins.

I duly signed my contract for *Bo-Peep and Red Riding Hood*, and was overjoyed to discover that my theatrical value was two pounds ten shillings a week, with half salary for morning performances. I was engaged as a "Letter Lady"—which meant that I formed one of a certain number of show-girls who were grouped collectively under the different letters of the alphabet. Our position at the theatre was purely ornamental, and I think the chorus and ballet regarded us with slightly amused contempt as being people who did not trouble to work for their money.

Directly rehearsals commenced I practically lived at "The Lane," and I was curiously attracted by the new world in which I found myself. The women were totally unlike any I had met before, and their outspoken opinions certainly completed my final disillusionment. I made a good many friends, and my grass-green ignorance occasioned much food for mirth. "Were you brought up on an uninhabited island, little Craven?" queried the crowd, when I had been unusually simple in my remarks. They shrieked with delight at my shocked expression when I heard intimate details discussed with all the freedom of everyday topics. "It didn't know that people could be so wicked," they chaffed, or else it was, "Shut up, girls—here's innocent Jill," for it was decreed that I was to enact that heroine in the Procession of Nursery Rhymes.

It was certainly a strange life, and when I compared it with my former existence I could hardly believe that I was Maude Craven. There was plenty of excitement, which I must confess appealed to me, and I loved the



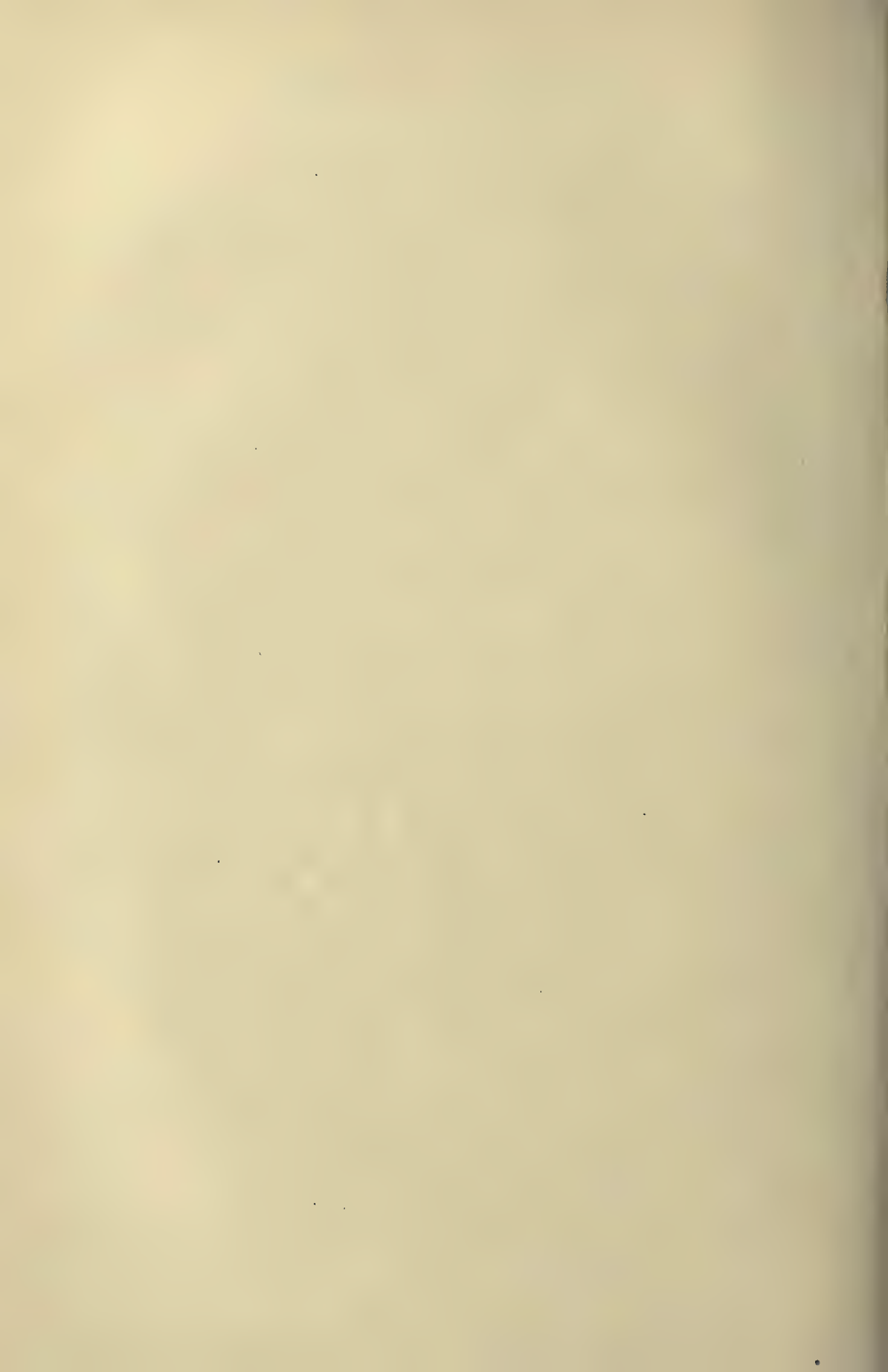
MAUDE CRAVEN
The Earliest Portrait



MRS. WILLIAM CRAVEN
(Mrs. Foulkes's mother)



MAUDE CRAVEN
In Drury Lane Days



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beautiful dresses in which I was to appear. Rehearsals were very tedious; we sometimes sat for hours in the great theatre, watching the principals going through their parts, and as Boxing Day approached we did not often leave the theatre until past midnight.

I was rather scared by the personality of Sir Augustus Harris, whose moods were variable, and, like the child with the curl, "when he was cross he was *horrid*." I can see him as if it were yesterday, seated in the centre of the stage, issuing his short, sharp commands, and occasionally emphasising them with a thud of his heavy stick. Nothing escaped his keen eyes, and woe betide the luckless offender who happened to incur his wrath.

"Can't you *move*, Miss?" he would shout. "You're not here to stand and grow good! Now, ladies—all over again."

I think Augustus Harris possessed great genius in the creation of spectacular effects, as he knew to a fraction the value of groupings and colour; but, in my opinion, his schemes would never have materialised so well as they did without the assistance of Arthur Collins. It is only those who know the inner workings of any great enterprise who are rightly able to judge who is directly responsible for the ultimate issues, and although Sir Augustus Harris was unrivalled as a producer, it was his able lieutenant who supplied the link in the chain which meant success.

I always liked Arthur Collins as a man, and I admired his talents as a manager, but in those days he would doubtless have applied the words of Defarge to me and said: "Who's *this* little fly; I don't know her." He possessed infinite tact, and he alone was able to manage the irascible "Guv'nor" when the

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stupidity of girls had made his temper past praying for.

How vividly those days stand out when I now recall them to my memory ! I see Dan Leno's delicate, quizzical face and hear him jokingly say, "Are you hurt, Miss?" when, as Jill, I practised rolling down an incline with Jack; there was Little Tich, just the same merry, good-natured soul as he is to-day; Herbert Campbell, with the slow, expansive smile; and the two Maries—Lloyd and Loftus. Johnny d'Auban arranged the ballets, and even drilled the "Letter Ladies" in the way they should go round—not the mulberry bush, but the maypole. Occasionally when a "call" was late we went to be measured and fitted for our frocks, either at the great costumiers, or else up in the "Wardrobe," where armies of needlewomen sat working all day on rainbow-hued gauze and magnificent brocade.

It was ceaseless activity from morning to night, and as I was obliged to stay late at the theatre, I decided to leave Haverstock Hill and seek rooms nearer "The Lane." I was fortunate enough to secure some in the quaint old house at the extreme end of Cowley Street, Westminster, and I moved there, with many regrets at saying good-bye to my friends at Haverstock Hill.

I was quite happy, hidden away at the back of the Abbey, and I loved my curious panelled rooms, which looked out over a sea of roofs and chimneys. Tradition had it that this house had once been a hiding-place for Jacobites in '45, and that a secret staircase led to a passage which communicated with another "safe" house by the river. The place and its surroundings appealed to my love of historical romance, and I liked to walk late at night past the Houses of Parliament

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and feel the cool breeze from the river blowing the theatrical cobwebs from my tired brain. I always rushed by one particular house near St. Margaret's Church, as I had been reading that gruesome book, "Through a Glass Darkly," and I associated it with the mansion where the unjust judge was tried and condemned to death by the powers of Evil.

It seemed so strange to be out in the streets by myself, and I was morally pulled up with a jerk when I first realised that I, Maude Craven, was actually walking alone at an hour which hitherto had meant severely "bed." At ten o'clock the front door at home was invariably barred against the night and the chain safely and carefully "put up," the hall gas was then turned down to a glimmer, and by half-past ten silence reigned. That was not a year ago! I had escaped out of the family front door, but the fact remained that it was now bolted against me, and that my fate was apparently to be left outside in more senses than one.

I noticed many things that sometimes jarred on my freedom; for the expression on men's faces was totally different when they looked at a girl who was not safely shadowed by a mother or an aunt. Sometimes eyes sought mine with strange knowledge in their depths, and, as the slumbering beast in man awoke, I was frightened at what I did not then understand. I have often since marvelled at the restraint which men are able to exercise over their facial expression, since absolutely worthy members of Society are able to look like satyrs when they joyously drop the sanctified mask which they wear for family edification. At this period I was gradually beginning to understand things, but I experienced one of the greatest of many

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fresh shocks when I was shown a pair of tights and told that I was expected to wear them.

“Oh, but I *can't*,” I gasped. “*Can't*, indeed!” said Mrs. Thornhill, the wardrobe mistress, who was presiding over the distribution of tights. “Of what use are nice legs, I should like to know, if you don't make the best of them?”

“Nice legs! Make the best of them!” I was absolutely dumbfounded, for I had hitherto never seriously considered the question of legs.

Legs were simply looked upon by my family as those parts of the human frame which supported the trunk, and caused you to be tall or short, as the case might be. If you chanced to be careless or unlucky in your descent of stairs, you might fall and break your leg, and they would also encounter disaster if you slipped upon ice or orange-peel. They might chance to be afflicted with rheumatism or varicose veins in mature life, and it was quite permissible to mention and complain of the existence of a *stiff leg*; but to consider legs as enviable or decorative adjuncts was unheard of! In my home, legs were simply legs, and nothing more; indeed, they were rarely mentioned, except when a shocked voice occasionally hissed: “Pull down your skirt; you're showing your legs.”

I was now faced with the fact that they were desirable possessions, so desirable that you even padded your tights if you were a little lacking in curves. “How on earth shall I ever get into a pair?” I asked; and a girl who looked upon my ignorance as a priceless joke initiated me into the mysteries of fixing a half-penny under the silk at either side of my tights, tying the tape over the coins, and arranging the fleshings without a wrinkle.

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Regular meals at regular times vanished to the Back of Beyond in the Land of Bohemia, and I became quite used to hearing the question, unheard of at home: "Have a drink?" I knew people sometimes drank wine before lunch, as a decanter of sherry and some Osborne biscuits were brought into the library every morning for those of the family who felt a little "faint," but promiscuous libations were unknown.

We girls used often to get something to eat at the "Albion," where principals, chorus and ballet rubbed shoulders together in the queer dark old tavern in Russell Street, with the wooden partitions and small tables which belonged entirely to a bygone generation. Everybody was "hail fellow well met," and although some of the favourites of fortune in our ranks were slightly disdainful, the majority of the girls I knew were absolutely devoid of "side."

The conditions of theatrical life in 1892 were very different from those of the present day, and even the type of show girl then, and now, has completely changed. Fine figures were more esteemed then than conventionally pretty faces, and many of the girls at Drury Lane were almost perfect examples of beauty of form. I think the "beauties" at this time were far more striking in appearance than are the much-advertised actresses of to-day, and they must certainly have possessed more mysterious glamour for the public. There were then no halfpenny illustrated papers, and, as the *Sketch* and *Tatler* were non-existent, the domestic pursuits of stage favourites were not common knowledge for the thousands who now see photographs of the celebrated lights of musical comedy engaged in motoring, gardening and golfing just like ordinary

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people. The imagination was then stimulated but not satisfied.

There were no *revues* all the year round to provide a sort of perpetual out-of-season pantomime for the public, and the American element was almost unknown, but I think the old order was in many ways infinitely preferable to the new regime, because there then seemed to be so much more *camaraderie* than one meets with in "the profession" to-day.

Kate Marshall and I became very friendly, and as she shared rooms with one of the Gaiety girls, I soon became familiar with the doings at the "Sacred Lamp." Many of the lovely women I knew there are dead, and some names seem to have faded entirely out of remembrance, but I like to recall the exquisite face of Hetty Hamer, the grace of Blanche Massey, beautiful Lilian Price, Kate Cannon's *chic* attractiveness, and a host of others—vanished, who knows where?

I was not unhappy on the first Christmas Day which I spent away from home. I had some roast beef and plum pudding sent up for my dinner by my kind landlady, and afterwards I sat by the window in my little panelled room, listening to the bells of the Abbey and watching the afternoon draw in until the roofs and chimneys disappeared into the twilight.

I felt a trifle sad when I pulled down the blind and shut out the winter evening, but as I had never enjoyed a happy Christmas I had nothing really to regret, and therefore the present did not suffer by comparison with the past. I often wondered whether Mamma ever thought of me or troubled how I fared, but all that I most ardently desired was to keep well, for in good health alone lay my safety. Luckily, there was no return of the troublesome cough, and, in spite of the

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icy temperature "behind" and the draughts whose name was legion at Drury Lane, I managed to keep well—in fact, I thought, when I stood half-clad at dress rehearsal, that the word "flannel" in conjunction with health must be unknown in the Land of Bohemia. I remember I looked rather pretty as Jill, in short skirts and a large be-ribboned hat, and Charles Crombie sketched me for the *Daily Graphic* as I stood in the wings holding my pail. I remember that Mrs. Sedger (Sir Augustus's sister) was very angry with me because I had not put on my hat to her liking, and whilst she was scolding me with much vehemence I was told that Sir Augustus Harris wanted to see me.

"Go along, you tiresome girl," cried Mrs. Sedger, as I hurried away, glad to escape so easily. "The Guv'nor" was on the other side of the stage. "Come here—you, this way, Miss!" shouted someone; and at last I stood before Sir Augustus. "I want you to go to the Tyne Theatre, Newcastle," he said, without any preliminaries; "the pantomime needs livening up, so I am going to send six of the 'Letter Ladies' there as Royal Housemaids in the Palace Scene. You're the height and build. Will you go?"

"I think——" I began.

"Don't think," he said. "I've no time to listen to thoughts. Yes or no—quick, now!"

"Yes," said I, too terrified to refuse.

"Off with you, then," said "The Guv'nor."
"Mr. Barry will tell you what to do."

I had hardly time to realise how this sudden change must, of necessity, upset my quiet life at Cowley Street, but I knew that it was no use making trouble; the theatre represented my daily bread and butter, and I could not afford to quarrel with it. I accordingly went

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to Mr. Barry, the assistant stage-manager, who was always very kind to me, and received my instructions from him, which were to leave for Newcastle on the following Saturday afternoon. "You'll find diggings somewhere, I expect," he observed. "Good-bye, Miss Craven—and good luck."

CHAPTER X

RECOLLECTIONS OF "THE LANE"

NEWCASTLE was a dull episode in my stage experience, but it is a curious fact that I represented "Austria" in the Procession of Nations, the country which has figured so largely in two of the memoir books with which my name is associated. But as I walked nightly across the stage of the Tyne Theatre, dressed in brown velvet and fur, with a Magyar jacket thrown over one shoulder, attended by four pages who carried my imperial mantle, I never dreamed that I should ever become the confidante of an Austrian Archduchess and write the tragic story of her life as Crown Princess of Saxony. The same winter that I made my début at "The Lane" witnessed the marriage of Princess Louisa of Tuscany to Frederick August of Saxony, when, full of high hopes, she unknowingly took the first step on the *Via Crucis* of her unhappy after-life.

There was then a seemingly impassable gulf between the Imperial Princess and the girl who was earning two pounds ten shillings a week, but nothing is impossible when

"Heaven from all creatures hides the Book of Fate,
All but the page prescribed—their present state."

I lived very quietly with another girl in comfortable rooms close to the theatre, and, although I detested Newcastle, I benefited considerably by the change of

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air and scene; I managed to save money, and when I came back to London I felt I had not, after all, made a failure of this initial venture. As my old rooms at Westminster were let, I decided to live in Chelsea, and that summer I secured an engagement in *Pal o' Archie's*, a musical skit on Pagliacci which Sir Augustus Harris was about to produce at the Palace Theatre.

Kate Marshall and I were Italian peasants, and I think that *Pal o' Archie's* was the first time a "Beauty Chorus" was advertised as an attraction, for Sir Augustus placarded the announcement of the little play with the head-line "A Bevy of Beauties," and the words also figured in the collection of photographs outside the entrance to the theatre. Juliette Nesville played in *Pal o' Archie's*, and she was certainly unequalled in her own line; her dainty dancing and fascinating personality made her very attractive, and it seems sad to think that this bright being should have suffered so much bodily pain before death came to her as a merciful release.

Pal o' Archie's was quite successful, and it was followed by *Scaramouche*, a fantastic pantomime-ballet which was admirably produced, and faintly recalled the kind of entertainment so dear to the hearts of Louis XIV. and the Court of Versailles.

I was neither unhappy nor overworked during this summer of 1898. I managed to exist without any serious anxieties, and, being young, I did not take much account of the morrow. I was free—which was all that really mattered—and I gradually began to forget that I had ever been a prisoner. Sometimes I thought of Grandmamma, and I felt sorry to have caused my family pain; but I reflected that if my conduct was

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reprehensible, it had at least afforded everyone the gloomy joy of being able to say: "I told you so—just what we might have expected would happen to Maude!"

One Sunday the mood seized me to revisit my old home at Brighton. It was a foolish sentimental idea, but I was a foolish sentimental girl at that time. So I caught the afternoon express, and as I walked slowly down Trafalgar Street towards St. Peter's House I stopped suddenly, because I saw that the captive tree was waving me greeting from its prison in the garden. The poplar was unchanged, and its green spire still stood erect against the sky; but I was no longer the little girl who had watched it from the windows of the old house; I had escaped; but my friend was still waiting for freedom.

"I've come back," I said, "but I feel the world has covered me with scars which I shall never lose. I rather wish I was safe with you on the other side of the wall."

I passed on, and the feeling of sadness awakened in me by the sight of the poplar increased when I found myself once more before the gates of Wellesley House. I looked cautiously up the drive, but there was no sign of life outside or inside the house. All the blinds were pulled up to the same height, the white curtains all hung in equal folds, the gravel path looked untrodden by the foot of man, and the neatly trimmed shrubs had not a single leaf out of place. I noticed that the hutch-like summer-house, with its varnished woodwork, was still standing on the close-cut lawn. Its door was open—perhaps Grandmamma had been enjoying the quiet afternoon in the rather stuffy shelter! But all at once I realised that I did not fit

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into this peaceful picture—not even as a Peri outside the gates of Paradise! Last night I had been eating bread, cheese and mustard pickles in the dressing-room, and drinking half a pint of beer out of a tin can, at a time when members of most worthy families were seated at dinner discussing the usual clear soup made interesting by worm-like vermicelli.

I shuddered, and again I thought how *I* had looked last night. I had not worn the discreet semi-evening gown of convention, but had boldly dined *sans* bodice and skirt; my table was the wooden lid of a dress-box, and I was obliged to be very careful how I ate the pickles for fear lest any of the thick vinegar should mark the grease-paint with which my face was made up.

No—I decided, I was utterly impossible as a family proposition, and I retraced my steps stationwards. As I sat watching the familiar country until it gradually became submerged into Greater London, I decided that it was certainly not advisable to disturb the Past; and, indeed, I think it is far better to imagine scenes than to recall them by a personal visit. There is always something disappointing in raking up the ashes of sentiment, as one hardly ever discovers a spark of the ancient fire with which to warm the frozen heart.

I sometimes like to remember a lonely hill-road far away in Yorkshire where I once walked on Christmas Eve when a solemn hush hung over Nature and a little “keening” wind came sighing across the snow-wrapped moors. I was happy at the time, and when I have felt more disillusioned than usual I have pictured that ice-bound road and imagined that I was really there. But if I were to try and live over again a day that is dead, I am sure the experiment would be a failure—the hill

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would be too steep for romance and I should certainly soon be out of breath.

I signed on for the 1893 pantomime, *Robinson Crusoe*, whose cast included Ada Blanche, Marie Lloyd, Herbert Campbell, Little Tich, and the immortal "Dan." Comelli designed the dresses, and perhaps I may be pardoned for saying that I think his costumes then were far more appealing to the eye than they are at the present day, when his former simplicity has been exchanged for the bizarre effects peculiar to modern *revue*.

The *pièce de résistance* in the pantomime was the "Panorama of History," in which scenes from English history were depicted in dumb show before an ever-changing background. The designs for the costumes alone represented months of patient research work, and no efforts were spared to render the whole production accurate down to the smallest and seemingly the most insignificant detail.

Comelli selected me for the rôle of Queen Matilda, the wife of that Royal bookworm, Henry I., and I had to enact a good deal of pantomime action during the short time I was on the stage. My costume was a curiously beautiful scheme in white and grey—an exact copy of the dress of the period—and the silver and grey embroideries with which it was covered actually took four months to work. I wore a Royal mantle deeply bordered with ermine, and the only touch of colour lay in the sparkling green stones of my girdle and crown.

I pinned a long silver-entwined plait of dark hair behind each ear, and my head was swathed in wrappings of soft silk muslin which fell loosely behind me in the guise of a veil; in fact, I looked exactly like an animated effigy of the wife of a Crusader on an altar tomb.

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"Are you Queen Matilda, Miss?" said a voice whose accents bespoke the Cockney. "Yes," I replied, and I noticed that my interrogator was a short, timid-looking little man, with a feeble, fair moustache and anxious-looking blue eyes. "Yes, I'm Queen Matilda," I repeated. "That's good enough for me," answered the little man. "Well, I'm your Royal 'usband. I'm down for Henry I."

"That's all right," said I.

"It *isn't* all right," said my "Royal 'usband" crossly. "I want a few words with you, Miss——"

"A thousand, if you like."

"Well, come over 'ere," said he; "we can just talk confidential-like. See 'ere—this job means a lot to me, and don't you forget it either."

"Indeed. How's that?"

"I'm a-coming to it if you don't 'urry me. It so 'appens that I've always 'ad a feeling I was marked for an actor. '*Very well*, I'll never rest,' says I, 'until I tread the all-British boards of Drury Lane and follow in the footsteps of Kean and Kemble.' I've been reading 'em up at home, and I know all about 'em. Do you 'appen to know the name of Kean?"

"Yes, slightly," I answered, trying to conceal a smile, for the King was really an amusing person.

"I've got a toyshop off the Brixton Road," he continued; "quite a tidy business, for they breed kids like rabbits our way—never saw such quantities in all my natural! But I simply 'ated the dolls and such-like with a perishing 'atred, and at times I've sometimes felt I could smash up the whole show with a chopper. 'Owever, there is a tide in the affairs of man. I've persuaded my two aunts to look after the shop while I'm qualifying for the drama, and the old gals are as

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happy as sandboys selling the kids marbles and slate pencils and doing a steady business in wool balls and rattles for the infants.

"I'm taking on this Henry I. job quite seriously, and as you don't look a flighty bit yourself, suppose we work 'ard and give a really fine rendering of the hact?"

"Of course, I shall be only too pleased," I responded politely. "Do you like your costume?"

"Fair to middling," he answered, "but I'm not struck with the sort of dressing-gown Henry seems to have worn. Now, I'm partial to a doublet and 'ose myself."

Poor little man; he was deadly in earnest, and at last I think that he really imagined himself to be Henry I. The girls who took the parts of the Court ladies were full of fun and nonsense, and they chaffed the proprietor of the toyshop most unmercifully. At last he became positively nervous when the time drew near for our entrance. "Ladies, ladies," he would beg, "do be serious; don't joke so silly—remember this is 'istory." Then, with a sudden wild appeal: "Ladies, do 'ave a little consideration for *me*."

I have often wondered what became of Henry I. from Brixton, and if he eventually returned to cater for successive relays of children or whether the lure of the stage seized him for good and all. I hope not, for it is a hard life, but hardest of all for the men whom Fate decrees shall never rise to be other than supers and choristers. There is always something rather "Miss-ish" in seeing men in this capacity, and although it is a little different in serious drama, the ordinary youths who carry garlands or else represent "knuts" are unmanly objects, and it is a good thing

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that their ranks have now been thinned by the call :
“ Your King and Country need you.”

It is curious that, whereas the average chorus-girl can always manage to look “ a perfect lady,” the majority of male supers never quite look the gentlemen they endeavour so strenuously to represent. Their suits don’t set well, they are too immaculate, and I don’t think there is one known instance of any gentleman of the chorus having married a dowager countess or a baroness in her own right.

I used to hear many strange stories in those days, and I was always interested to know how much the word “ love ” entered into the lives of my various acquaintances.

My early ideas concerning the stage had chiefly originated through reading Ouida’s novels, where actresses are always represented as being fair, frail and exceedingly expensive as financial propositions. However, like that of her Guardsman hero, this type was distinctly overdrawn in the stage life with which I was familiar. But women are women all the world over, and there is one strongly marked point of resemblance between saints of society and sinners of the stage—they all appreciate jewels ! For just as the savage beauty hangs herself with bones and beads, so does her more civilised sister festoon herself with pearls and diamonds, because in their respective worlds beads and diamonds represent the value placed upon their charms by Man !

I remember hearing a girl at “ The Lane ” relate how she circumvented a mean-minded admirer who, after much persuasion, had been induced to make her a present of a diamond brooch. “ Something simple for me,” she told him. “ I hate clusters and twirls.”

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"Well, dear, I admire your taste. Something simple let it be," answered the careful lover.

"I've been thinking," said the artless girl, "how nice it would be to have my name made into a brooch. Will you go with me and order one?"

"He came like a bird to Bond Street," she told her appreciative audience in the dressing-room, "and I chose a ripping brooch—nice *large* stones, too."

"Well, I never!" cried an amazed listener, "fancy that! But your name is so short; it couldn't have cost much. You *were* a fool, Ida."

"My name wasn't 'Ida' in Bond Street," said the young lady demurely. "I asked him to let me wear the name by which mother called me before I went on the stage.

"And what is that, darling?" he asked.

"*Gwendoline*," I said; "but, girls, I tell you that I didn't dare look at him when I said it."

Another story concerned a good-looking woman who had formerly been at the Alhambra. She was a happy creature, and she lived with a man to whom she was most devotedly attached. Business, however, necessitated his leaving London for South America, and Marian, almost heartbroken, left the theatre, and brooded over her troubles to such an extent that her mind became seriously affected. She was removed to a private asylum, and after she had remained there for over a year her sanity returned, and she was allowed to leave.

There had been no lack of money to make life easy, as her lover had paid a generous sum into her banking account which would amply suffice until his return; but although her reason was restored to her, the past—so far as it related to love—was absolutely blotted out.

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In her early life this quiet, rather refined woman had been brought up in most squalid surroundings, and as a young girl she had been obliged to earn a living by cleaning the front-door steps of the houses round Euston Square.

From being a "stepper" she had drifted to the stage, and there met the man with whom she afterwards lived; but after leaving the asylum her mind went back to the days when she cleaned steps, and she therefore happily resumed her former occupation. She lived frugally in an attic in Judd Street, and her theatrical friends often encountered her hearthstoning, utterly oblivious of the fact that she had ever seen them before.

In the meantime Marian's lover returned to London, all anxiety to know the reason of her long silence, and to his horror he learnt what had befallen her. He would not, however, be convinced that she had entirely forgotten him, and he resolved to see her and endeavour to recall their former life to her recollection. A girl who had known her took him to the room in Judd Street, and they arrived just as Marian—or now, to be more exact, Mary Ann—was preparing tea.

She had not removed her bonnet, which was perched rakishly on hair whose disordered condition called for instant attention; her face was dirty, her hands were rough and red, and her nails were ground down with hard work and hearthstone. An old cotton blouse and a much-worn skirt completed the picture, and when her lover remembered the Marian of former days he looked at her in speechless horror. Mary Ann regarded the intruders resentfully. "And what do you want *here*?" she demanded. At the sound of her voice the man who loved her was silent no longer.

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"Oh, Tiny, darling," he cried, "surely you know *me*? I'm Charlie, and I've come to take you home."

Mary Ann at once became the embodiment of outraged respectability, and, setting down the teapot, she advanced to where her lover and her friend were standing in close proximity to the door.

"And *who* are you addressing as 'Tiny'?" she asked with ominous politeness.

"Why—you," unwisely answered the visitor.

"Then, I'll thank you to remember you're addressing a respectable working woman. 'Tiny,' indeed! I'll 'Tiny' you if I hear any more of it. And," she stormed, addressing the girl, who was now uncertain whether to laugh or to cry, "I'll teach you, you fast young cat, to bring strange men here. Clear out, or I'll give you both in charge."

There was nothing left but to beat a precipitate retreat; and Mary Ann never regained her lost memory. Two or three years ago she was still living, and still cleaning steps utterly unmindful that she had ever existed in a more lucrative employment.

I was always interested to know the opinion of men held by the average chorus-girl, and it was rather a rude awakening to discover that few were credited with possessing the capacity for "playing the game."

"My dear Maude," said an acquaintance of those days, "men are as keen as mustard while the fancy lasts, and when they get sick of a woman they drop her in double-quick time. If we are only worth treating like that, why should we study them or their pockets? Let them spend money, and take all you can, for if you don't someone else will. Make use of a man, but never lose your head over him. That's *my* way of going on."

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This philosophy was certainly profitable with this particular girl, who trained herself to look upon admiration and affection solely from a business point of view. A great friend of the late King Edward, familiarly designated as "Old X.," once gave her a beautiful writing-table, which, however, was more suitable for a boudoir in Mayfair than for the *milieu* into which it was introduced. The recipient signally failed to appreciate the gift, and told "Old X." that he was little better than a fool for buying it. "Look here," she said, "I hate writing. You know what my scrawl is like. I've no use for a silly thing like this. Your womenkind may fancy a writing-table, where they can sit and scribble notes and put their bills into pigeon-holes ticketed 'Paid' or 'Unpaid.' It doesn't appeal to me. If you want to be a pal, send me along a hamper every week from Fortnum's—that's a far better idea."

I believe "Old X." sent the weekly hamper. He was a very good-natured peer, with homely tastes, and he would often come straight from a Drawing Room to my friend's flat, and ask for tea, bread and butter, and a kipper, which he declared acted as a wonderful pick-me-up after the dreary procession of *débutantes* which he had just witnessed at Buckingham Palace.

Another very human story of those days concerns a once popular beauty who is now dead. She was an attractive woman who had risen to notoriety from very small beginnings; her childhood was passed in a little general shop, but she never forgot her father and mother, and was never ashamed of them. She possessed lovely jewels, an infinite and expensive variety of clothes, and a house which represented the very last word in luxury. Her parents, wisely, did

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not moot the question of how those splendours were obtained; indeed, the simple souls did not even appreciate an invitation to visit her in Kensington.

The first time that they dined with their daughter was both memorable and mirthful. "Now, Pa," said the young lady, "you look very hot; you'd better have a wash before dinner"; and she led the way to a bathroom fragrant with perfume and shining with silver-topped bottles and handsomely embossed brushes. "There now, you'll find all you want," and, so saying, she left her bewildered father alone.

The old man eyed the paraphernalia of silver and perfume with deep distrust. "I've no use for this sort of thing," he decided; "a good sensible wash and brush-up is what *I* want." He therefore left the bathroom, and at last, by devious ways, found himself in the kitchen, which was presided over by a good-natured cook. Here his foot was on his native heath, and merely remarking, "Don't mind *me*," he took off his coat, went to the sink, seized a piece of yellow soap, and washed his face with whole-hearted vigour. At the conclusion of his ablutions, the cook, who possessed a similar parent, silently pointed to a clean round-towel which was hanging on the scullery door. "Thank you, Miss," said the guest of the evening. "I'm much obliged—fair reminds me of 'ome."

I have many happy memories of the winter of 1893, and I enjoyed the pantomime, as I was fortunate enough to dress with pleasant girls, and I became really fond of the hot dressing-room, with its confusion of clothes and make-up. Everything is much better arranged in the present day, but we never troubled ourselves about comfort, and we used to have merry tea-parties during afternoon "shows," when we

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clubbed together and our good-natured dresser catered for "something nice." Occasionally Dan Leno invited us to a "winkle" tea, and much merriment prevailed when we saw the pincushions studded with hatpins, with which we were expected to extricate the wily winkle.

There was a bomb scare towards the conclusion of the pantomime which, luckily for everyone, proved to be a false alarm. The introduction of so many Royal personages on the stage had enraged a rabid Socialist, and the apostle of equality determined to demonstrate his disapproval by drastic methods. He accordingly intimated that on a given night a bomb would be thrown on the stage, and that the assembled Royalties would be instantly blown to smithereens. It would be futile to say that we were not frightened at the prospect; we were—most thoroughly—but we presented a brave front to the enemy, and—nothing happened.

The final scene was very effective, as all those who had taken part in the historical pageant surrounded the mimic representatives of our own Royal Family; and I remember how amused Queen Alexandra was when she came to "The Lane" and saw her stage double appear with the Drury Lane Prince of Wales and dutifully greet Queen Victoria, who was a really life-like copy of the little, great lady.

My love of the supernatural soon made me ask whether there were any stories connected with the older parts of the theatre, and my curiosity was gratified. The "shoe room" was supposed to be haunted, as it had been the scene of a murder long ago, when a jealous Harlequin killed an unfaithful Columbine and made mincemeat of her remains. There was also a haunted box, and when it was not occupied

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by living people, shadows took their places, which were occasionally discernible to those at the wings; but, although I made many inquiries, I never heard the reason of the hauntings.

The theatre was a ghostly place when most of the lights were extinguished and silence reigned everywhere. It has been said that, since his death, Sir Augustus Harris has sometimes been seen by the firemen on duty, and it would not surprise me if such were the case, for, although his body rests peacefully, I am sure his spirit would return to his beloved Drury Lane if it were given half a quarter of a chance.

Covent Garden balls were great events during the pantomime, and the "Letter Ladies" always received invitations. Sir Augustus allowed us to have the loan of any dress out of the wardrobe at "The Lane" or Covent Garden, and I remember that I went twice as "Carmen," and sported two lovely gowns intended for Zélie de Lussan, but which had never been worn by her.

The fancy dress balls then were far more smart and amusing than they are to-day, and theatrical and Bohemian London was always largely represented. We looked upon them as great fun, and it was with light hearts and light feet that we used to walk across from "The Lane" to Covent Garden. I was young enough to enter thoroughly into the spirit of adventure which these balls represented, but occasionally I wondered at what game of life I was playing and in what it was destined to result.

I knew I could not go on living like this for ever, but I was fatalist enough to believe in the truth of the saying, "What is to be will be," so I did not, therefore, actively concern myself with thought of the future. I was then disposed to hate that world which

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I had known as a child and a young girl, because I now knew it to be peopled with so many hypocrites. I often used to look at the kind of women I had once known, and laugh contemptuously when I thought how wives little realised how unfaithful their husbands often were and of what small value was the fancied security of married life.

There is no doubt that my ideals gradually suffered, as I saw most of them ruthlessly shattered and I was never able to piece the fragments together again; but, mercifully for me, a breath of sweetness came to revive unexpectedly my fading belief in the beauty of life.

I was once watching the dancing at Covent Garden when a keen-featured man came up to where I was sitting and asked me whether I would give him the next waltz. I was very tired, and I told him so.

"You seem a little lost. Are you alone here?" he remarked.

"Oh, no," I said; "I'm with some of the girls from 'The Lane.' I was only resting for a moment."

"But you're not on the stage?" he persisted, with an air of incredulity.

"Oh, yes; this is my second pantomime."

"Well, my dear girl, you look as if you had strayed out of some country village," said he.

"It's my costume, I suppose," I remarked, for I was dressed as a violet-seller in short skirts, a big muslin apron, and a mob cap.

"No—it's *you*. Do you know, I don't care to see pathetic people alone in a place like this."

"Oh, I'm not really alone," I said hastily, instantly on the defensive. "I don't mind it, either. Why on earth don't you go and speak to someone else? I'm not a bit amusing."

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"Because I choose to stop with you. Now, suppose we two have an adventure? You're a violet-seller—very well—then come with me and see the flowers unpacked at the market, and I'll buy you as many as you can carry away."

The suggestion appealed to me, and I followed my new friend, who was evidently well known, as he exchanged greetings with many of the loungers in the foyer. Then we were soon outside in the mean streets, with the dawn of the March day just beginning to appear in the wind-swept sky.

I carried my wrap over my arm, as I wanted to be a real flower-girl for the time being, and, heedless of the stares and comments which greeted us, we made our way to where the spirit of those flowers I had always loved now led my tired feet.

All at once the air seemed to be impregnated with the breath of the wild country, and I seized a handful of wet moss, full of little dead leaves and tender grass-blades, and pressed it to my face in a passion of aching longing for the mysterious woods from whence it had been torn. I wanted to be there in the sweet and solemn hour when the morning wind stirs the trees and streams run more swiftly because the night is over and another joyous day has begun.

"Do I refresh you?" asked the moss. "My perfume is surely sweeter than the smoke which clings to your dress. You used to love flowers. Have you forgotten them? There are many of your friends here."

I looked. I was encircled with a sea of upturned flower faces, and their kisses rose and greeted me as I stood, still holding my bunch of wet moss. There were masses of white narcissi, offering incense to the morning; wind-swayed daffodils, protected from rough usage

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by bunches of green spear leaves; jonquils, exhaling liquid sweetness; and mingled with these came the faint exotic breath of the lilac and lilies from the Riviera. The mimosa waved its scented boughs and whispered to me of the blue sea of the Mediterranean, the grey quietude of olive woods high on the mountain-side, and it also spoke of the old gods who haunt their ruined temples.

"Dreaming, little Violet-seller?" said a voice. "You are evidently at home here. Now, I will buy you some flowers. Wait a moment. We'll carry this out exactly as I believe will please you best." The odd individual then hailed a hansom, ordered me to get inside, and presently he returned, followed by a porter who carried a quantity of flowers which were placed in the cab; and more and still more were brought, until the dingy vehicle gradually became a bower of white fragrance, from which my face emerged pale and tired-looking in the light of a new day.

"This is your little hour of romance," said my strange friend. "These flowers will serve to revive your hopes and your courage. Look on me merely as a Vision of the Night, because it is better for you, my child, that I should remain a stranger. Good-bye."

I held his hand for a moment, and he was lost in the crowd which hurried past me. I was afterwards told the name of my strange acquaintance, and I heard that my adventure was only one of the many caprices of a man well known for his wealth and his eccentricities. But I always like to believe that a pagan deity sought me out in the misty dawn, and that I communed with no less a being than

"Pan himself,
The simple shepherd's awe-inspiring god."

CHAPTER XI

MARRIAGE

I LEFT Lincoln Street in the spring of 1894, and went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Hubert, who had one of the charming old-fashioned houses in Beaufort Street, Chelsea, which have now nearly all been pulled down. Ada Hubert's sister shared rooms with my friend Kate Marshall, in Cheyne Row, so we had many happy times together, and that period of my life is full of pleasurable recollections.

The Beaufort Street house always reminded me of the quaint home described by Miss Braddon in her touching novel, "The Story of Barbara." There was a long, flower-filled garden, where we spent most of our time when the weather was fine, and my little sitting-room, at the top of the house, looked out over the curious Moravian graveyard which is hidden away under the shadow of the carpet-beating works. The Huberts were artistic people, and Ada's brother was the well-known artist, William Bartlett, whose sea pictures possess atmosphere and colour in such a wonderful degree.

I liked the easy *camaraderie* of those days, as Ada Hubert was most hospitable, and during the day the house was generally full of her sister's girl friends, for Omie was popular at the Gaiety, and one of the most good-natured, amusing women I have ever met. Mr. Hubert was utterly unlike his wife in disposition, so

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Carnival always ended before he was expected back from his office in Craven Street.

I used often to sit on the Embankment and enjoy the beautiful river effects which have appealed to so many artists since the time when Turner first immortalised the Thames at Chelsea. I had an odd belief that the reflection of the lamp-light which pierced the dark waters was not lamp-light at all, but golden ladders lowered from heaven, by which the souls of suicides who had met their death by drowning were enabled to climb from out the dreadful slime and ascend to freedom and forgiveness. I have never lost this curious idea, and whenever I see the golden ladders I always remember Chelsea Embankment, when I was a dreamer of dreams in the days of my youth.

It is rather derogatory to my *amour propre* to acknowledge that I cannot lay claim to having made innumerable conquests during this period of Bohemian freedom. However, as an autobiography should, by rights, be the chronicle of a soul laid bare, I will be perfectly frank and say that I was not greatly admired or sought after by men, either with honourable or dishonourable intentions.

It has been characteristic of my life that the type of good looks Heaven bestowed upon me has never found itself in sympathy with the fashion prevailing at the moment. As with my temperamental equipment, ever at issue with its surroundings, so with my physical endowment, either too early or too late, and somehow out of date.

When I was a girl the accepted idea of attractiveness in woman was that she should display generous lines and a well-developed bust and hips. Fine figures were much admired, and the "lean kine" padded

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themselves desperately until they were well covered to the outward eye. I was then as slender as a willow wand ; in fact, a man once said of me that I possessed a pretty face, but you couldn't be expected to fall in love with skin and bone. Nowadays, when women endeavour to look like blades of grass, the irony of Fate has decreed that in an age of strenuous slimness I should rush towards its opposite, and I have now developed the figure associated with principal boys of pantomime, which is also supposed to make a certain appeal to the senses of publicans and elderly sinners. So I suppose my appearance has always been wrong—too much or too little of me—and I will frankly admit that I would far rather have been able to sway and wave with the fashion than to have written successful books ; in fact, I actually wept when the *London Magazine* published my portrait in connection with " My Own Story," and described me, at a time of universal attenuation, as a " large " woman.

I had, however, one romance during my sojourn in old Chelsea, as a young and wealthy barrister fell in love with me, and I think, under different conditions, I could have lived my life happily with him. He was talented and kind-hearted, but, like myself, he was in temperament absolutely behind the age in which he lived. Edward really belonged to the times about which Thackeray and Mrs. Henry Wood wrote so vividly ; indeed, he was a composite character portrait of many of their immaculately sentimental heroes. He believed in and revered Woman, but he regarded her entirely from an Early Victorian standpoint, and the ringleted, crinolined ladies of that day, who produced albums on every possible occasion in which their friends contributed sketches or verse, were entirely after Edward's

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own heart. He specialised in ballads written on the lines of those found in the dear old affected "Books of Beauty" and similar productions which helped to swell the fortunes of many publishers during the first forty years of the nineteenth century.

Edward was a bard of the Emotions. He sang of domestic subjects, such as Birthdays, Parents, Marriage, Death, and Christmas. He always avoided the baser Passions of Mankind, and he found exceeding joy in the glorification of Friendship, which he imagined to be the purest gift sent from Heaven to Humanity.

Friendship was apostrophised by him under various names: it was a "sturdy oak," "a flaming pennon," "a rock," "*l'amour sans ailes*," and the "sole flower that blooms unfading in the desert of life." He absolutely believed in the truth of everything about which he sang, and I found real pleasure in his affection, because, stripped of the sickly husk of Early Victorian sentiment, it was in many respects genuine.

I occasionally thought how much I should like to marry Edward and settle down in the country with him. We would live in a delightful creeper-clad house, with a rose-embowered garden, where I could surround myself with flowers, and my poet-husband could write about Friendship to his heart's content. This quiet life would be restful after breasting the stream as I had done, and I made all kinds of pleasant plans for the future. I did not wish to cause anyone trouble; I yearned to be reconciled to my unanimously disapproving family, and I felt sure that they would be very pleased if I were only fortunate enough to marry this really nice man.

One day Edward asked me if I would meet his

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mother, to whom he had at last confided his affection for me, and, as I had now become worldly, I knew that being asked to meet a man's mother is usually a preliminary to marrying her son, so I was no longer in doubt that my admirer wished to make me his wife.

It was soon decided that the fateful interview should take place at the Earl's Court Exhibition, and I promised to meet Edward and his mother near the bandstand facing the Welcome Club. I had an unaccountable feeling of longing that this unknown woman should show me some affection, and I was ready to give her all my love out of sheer gratitude for being welcomed as a daughter. "Perhaps she'll be 'motherly,'" I thought; "someone to whom I can open my heart and who will help me to do my best in the world." I knew my faults, and I dreaded them mastering the good impulses which sometimes sprang into life and, fortunately, saved me from being dominated by my worse self.

These two eventful years had brought me experience, but no very real or lasting satisfaction. I intuitively knew that I had still much to do and much to suffer, but I always comforted myself by saying that I *could* be happy if my chance would only come. Now it seemed to have done so, and it was represented by Edward.

It was with inward trepidation and outward calm that I saw the good Edward and his mother approaching where I was seated under the young plane trees which embellished the newly laid-out grounds of the Exhibition. I had fondly imagined that the man who was so essentially Early Victorian would have of necessity an Early Victorian mother, one of the dear, sweet-faced, silver-haired old ladies of fiction, who wear

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black satin gowns adorned with cobwebby lace and who sit by the fire wrapped in fluffy white shawls with a table at their elbow upon which repose a well-worn Bible and a bottle of smelling-salts.

The sight of Mrs. D—— routed all these preconceived notions; indeed, I was so scared that I nearly rushed away without saying a word. She was a tall, massive woman of sixty or thereabouts, and the skill of a good dressmaker and a cunning *corsetière*, combined with money and taste, made her a very smart and awe-inspiring person. She was rather hard-looking, and her mouth shut like a trap when she looked at me and extended a lifeless hand in greeting.

“I’ll leave you and Mother alone,” said Edward; and he swiftly disappeared in the direction of the switchback railway.

The lady did not speak, but surveyed me steadily through her long-handled tortoiseshell lorgnette. At last she remarked coldly:

“So *you* are the girl that my son is anxious to marry?”

“Yes—please,” I answered, feeling like a sparrow fascinated by a boa-constrictor.

“Do you know that my son is a rich man?” continued the awful voice.

“I know he isn’t poor,” I said sulkily; “but I like *him*, not his money.”

“Oh, dear Miss Craven, I don’t think girls on the stage think much about love; it is chiefly £ s. d. with them. Edward has told me all about you, and, of course, you must be aware that a chorus-girl cannot possibly expect to marry a gentleman like my son.”

I blazed with anger. “Dukes have married actresses,” I retorted. “Your son is not a duke.

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Besides, you know, I am of good family; I've been well brought up. I'm surely your equal."

She ignored my speech and continued calmly: "I believe 'entanglements' can easily be untied with money. Please tell me for what sum you will release my son from any foolish promises which he may have been induced to make."

This was the last straw, and in the midst of my righteous wrath I again, as in the Worthing crisis, revolted bitterly at the useless cruelty of life. Why was it decreed that some women were always to be hurt? I wondered. Then I spoke in a voice which did not seem to belong to me:

"You are a *brute*," I said deliberately, "—a *brute*, and nothing else. I *was* fond of your son, and if he had married me I would have been a good wife. I never thought of him only as a rich man, but I would not marry him now if he were to pave the streets with gold for my pleasure. And why? Because I've seen *you*, and I wouldn't own you for a mother-in-law. However," I continued, "listen to me: I will marry within two months, and my husband shall be someone equal in birth to your son."

The mother of Edward sat speechless with amazement, as I had risen from my seat and was facing her with fury in my face and hatred in my heart. At this moment the neat figure of the bard came slowly towards us. In his hand he carried two large, ribbon-tied boxes of chocolate, and he looked as if he would like to sit down and then and there indite a sonnet "To Mother and Maude."

"I hope you've been getting on well together," said he.

I did not wait for Mrs. D——'s reply. "So well,"

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I answered, looking at him steadily, "that I never want to see or speak to your mother again." Then, without a word, I left them.

I returned to Beaufort Street a changed girl, and, sad to admit, the change was distinctly for the worse. I had now no belief in goodness, I raged against the inequality of the world, and, above all, I hated those concerned in the tragedy of my upbringing.

I cannot describe the conflicting emotions which possessed my soul. I ached for revenge, my wounded pride refused to listen to reason; I wildly desired to show this unwomanly woman that if I *were* little Miss Nobody, at least I wouldn't remain so. There must have been a strain of snobbishness in me, because, otherwise, I should never have felt so aggrieved at being called a chorus-girl when I had, of my own sweet will, chosen to become one. But, as the old proverb says, "He who has the devil on his neck must give him work," and the devil had most certainly taken possession of my heart for a while.

I wanted to hurt Edward, I wanted to triumph over his mother, but I forgot that injuries are apt to recoil on the person who inflicts them. All that I can urge in my own excuse is that I did not then realise the consequences which my act of utterly senseless pique would inevitably entail.

Six weeks after the interview at Earl's Court I married Charles Ffoulkes.

I met Mr. Ffoulkes at Beaufort Street, and I think he was at first attracted by my appearance, for, unluckily for himself, he admired slender women. He came of an old historic family, so I wickedly rejoiced that the first move in my game was *mine*, and the most severe punishment for my thoughtless and selfish

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behaviour is to acknowledge my folly in these pages, when it costs me some pains to cry openly, "Peccavi."

I acquainted my family with the news of my engagement, hoping that, at any rate, I should be allowed to be married from Wellesley House; but this was impossible owing to my grandmother's bad health, and I dared not ask for the loan of Park Gate, even for my wedding day. So once more Fate mocked me when I was pining for the very conventions of life which I had affected to despise. Apparently I couldn't even get married like anyone else!

My aunts provided my trousseau, and the Huberts insisted that I was to consider their house as the home which was denied me. Ada was very kind and sympathetic, but she told me bluntly that I was nothing better than a fool to marry in this reckless manner; she felt certain, she said, that I was only asking for trouble.

I was married on November 8th, 1894. I remember that I awoke early, and, with an intense desire for companionship, I slipped on my dressing-gown and went downstairs to the kitchen, where Ellen, the Irish servant, was struggling with a defiant fire. There was a dilapidated chair by the hearth that we called "The Ancestral Seat," and there I sat and watched Ellen become smuttier and smuttier with the combined effects of smoke and damp wood.

I had sometimes, as a girl, pictured the pleasurable excitement of my wedding day: the new trunks ready packed with pretty garments, the all-important gown spread out on the bed in the spare room, flowers everywhere, and the mother of my dreams speaking tenderly to me of the new life which would so soon be mine. I

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used to imagine myself holding her hand very tightly and putting my head on her shoulder, whilst I told her how much I loved her and how much I should miss her. But this ideal wedding was never to be mine; there was no dream-mother to make much of me, and no blessings seemed likely to result from my marriage, which, I had to acknowledge to my inmost heart, was the most reprehensible act of folly of which I had hitherto been guilty.

If I had been a better woman I should have thrown everything to the winds on that November morning, and refused to marry the man whose life I was probably about to make as unhappy as my own. But I was too much of a moral coward to face the gossip which would result from such a course.

As I sat gloomily watching the smoky fire I asked Ellen whether she did not occasionally find life quaint.

“Shure, Miss Maude, dear, it’s past thinkin’ of altogether,” she acknowledged.

After a cup of hot tea I gradually felt comforted. “It’s the foine time we’ll be havin’ entirely after you come back from the church,” said Ellen. “I’ve told fower barril-organs to come and play in the street; it’ll hearten ye up a bit for the lave-takin’.”

Again the irony of my life swept over my soul. “Fower barril-organs to hearten me up!” Could anyone possibly imagine a more commonplace exit for a honeymoon? But I said nothing, and even managed to smile as she handed me a cup of Bovril just as I was leaving for church—when, to my horror, I discovered the corpses of some scalded beetles which she had most unconcernedly served up with the stimulating beverage.

As weddings go, mine was a pretty affair, and

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everything, fortunately, went off admirably, although, except for Mamma, who had unexpectedly defied Mr. Waterhouse, my family was conspicuous by its absence. I was married in a brown, fur-trimmed dress and a pretty hat covered with violets; and in the late afternoon, well wrapped in a warm sealskin coat, I left with my husband to spend our honeymoon at a house he had taken on the river.

The Thames in the month of November is not conducive to romance, and this November was memorable by reason of the great floods. Two days after my marriage I was awakened by the splash of water, varied by a succession of recurrent thuds and the crash of breaking crockery. I rushed to the window, and I could faintly make out that the dry land of yesterday was nowhere to be seen, and that we seemed, like the Ark, alone upon the face of the waters.

Cautiously I opened my bedroom door and crept down the stairs, only, like the Ancient Mariner, to discover water, water everywhere. A rolling procession of pots and pans was sailing merrily along from the kitchen, rushing into violent conflict with the partly submerged furniture in its progress, and I specially remember an earthenware bread-pan which courted ruin by an encounter with the piano, when, for the first time in my life, I saw my bread literally cast upon the waters.

There was nothing to be done but to wait patiently until the water subsided, and I did not appreciate the situation at all.

When the afternoon of the first day of the flood was rapidly merging into twilight I sat in my bedroom eating a horrid meal of sardines which had been salvaged from the shipwreck downstairs. The candle guttered

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in the damp air, neuralgia and rheumatism hovered about me, and in one awful moment I suddenly realised how great must have been the boredom of the Ark. Ours was almost a similar position, and oh ! how deeply I sympathised with the feelings of Mrs. Noah, which the Book of Genesis has so thoughtlessly left to the imagination.

CHAPTER XII

AN EXPERIMENT IN INDEPENDENCE

AFTER the episode of the great flood we lived for a short time at Bedford Park. I there renewed my friendship with Dr. and Mrs. Todhunter, who possessed a lovely house with a large garden, which was most charmingly illuminated when they gave their evening "At Homes." It was at one of these that I first met Louis N. Parker, and we became friendly, as he not only understood the things which made such a strong appeal to me, but he encouraged me to talk freely about them. Like Douglas Sladen, Louis Parker is a most unaffected man, utterly unspoilt by praise and worldly success. He is the embodiment of sympathy when his advice is sought, nothing ever seems a trouble to him, and I have always envied the imagery and knowledge which are stored in his wonderful brain. Never was the name of Napoleon so aptly bestowed! For just as the great Napoleon appreciated the value of display and made a gorgeous pageant of the First Empire, so his namesake has educated public taste to appreciate the value of the pageant which has covered the dry bones of history with the garments of glamour and romance.

I delighted to discuss questions of the hour with Louis Parker. He was so sincere in his convictions, so absolutely unbiassed, that one instinctively felt that his opinion must be right, and when I tell the rosary

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of my recollections I always linger over his name because he extended so much sympathy and kindness to me in the long ago. What always struck me about Louis Napoleon Parker was his exuberant joy as of a boy. He has never grown up, and, though rich in experience of human nature, he is never cynical; a dear, generous, kindly being.

My husband and I occasionally went to the Gleeson Whites' house, in St. Peter's Square, Hammersmith, where I made the acquaintance of Aubrey Beardsley in rather an amusing manner. I was sitting, as I fancied, alone, when I suddenly noticed that the extreme end of the settee was occupied by a pale, weird-looking youth wrapped in deep thought, who kept on frowning at his apparently unpleasant reflections.

Aubrey Beardsley was then in the height of his meteor-like career, and it was considered a great achievement for a hostess to secure his presence at her house. I had never seen him, but I was rather curious to meet the morbid-minded genius, and as Mrs. Gleeson White always managed to have the latest celebrities at her "evenings," I was delighted to hear that the artist of *The Yellow Book* was expected that very night.

It was getting late, and, as I was tired, I began to wonder whether it was worth while waiting to see the great Aubrey. I therefore turned to the meditative occupant of the settee: "Please forgive my bothering you," I said, "but do you happen to know if Mr. Beardsley is *really* coming? I want to see him because he is so much *en l'air* at present, but I have a feeling that I shall not like him."

"And, pray, why not?" remarked the anæmic-looking young man.

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“Well, because I think his soul is revealed in his work. His brain must do nothing else but weave tissues of beautiful wicked thoughts, for he always seems to discover the canker in the rose. Besides, I think he must be very conceited, and rightly so, though I do wish he thought a little less of his own importance and came to ‘At Homes’ at a reasonable hour. I suppose he wants to ‘take the stage’ alone.”

“He doesn’t want to do anything of the kind,” said the young man, curiously enough stung to anger by my words. “I’m Aubrey Beardsley, and I didn’t feel well enough to turn up before, and now I’m as seedy as I can possibly be; that’s why I’m sitting *here*.”

“I’m very sorry,” I apologised; “but you know, Mr. Beardsley, that all celebrities have the reputation of doing exactly as they please.”

“Well,” he acknowledged ungraciously, “if you weren’t aware who I was, you were perfectly at liberty to express your opinion of me—but candour hurts occasionally.”

I thought it wiser not to reply, and presently he joined the throng who waited on his coming. Poor Beardsley! What strange, perverted genius he possessed, and I always compare it to those evil orchids which lie, like the unvalued jewels in the depths of the sea, “in dead men’s skulls, and in those holes where eyes did once inhabit.”

We spent the autumn of 1895 with my husband’s mother at Oxford, and I failed signally to appreciate the depressing dullness of the University City. One felt as if the very houses were built of books instead of bricks, and I used to think that the very dogs barked in Latin and Greek.

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I admired the colleges, but there were so many of them that I became speedily surfeited. Nothing individual stood out in this place of paralysing worth; it was one long vista of unbroken excellence, and after a time it began to pall. Oxford out of term must, I fancy, strongly resemble the accepted idea of heaven—a place where, to use a business expression, there is perforce “nothing doing.”

I well remember a young Balliol man who used often to come and see us. He gave me the impression of a soul in perpetual revolt, consumed by some impelling restless energy which swept it along regardless of opinion or opposition. His personality literally burnt itself into the minds of other people, and his grand emotion-torn face was an index to the genius which shone in his strange pale eyes.

This man, so unlike the usual products of Balliol, was none other than Hilaire Belloc, who has more than fulfilled his intellectual promise of twenty years ago. He was one of the most interesting men I have ever met, and long before he wrote about Danton I used to think that he must surely be a re-embodiment of the great demagogue of the French Revolution.

A curious vein of humorous whimsicality runs through the granite of his genius, for who has not laughed at and enjoyed his priceless “Bad Child’s Book of Beasts”? When I was at Oxford he evolved a sort of Puck-like creature called Billy-Go-Blink, whose antics were illustrated by Charles Ffoulkes, and I only wish that I could remember some of Belloc’s inimitable verse. Why the Billy-Go-Blink book never materialised I know not, but perhaps after these lines have appeared some enterprising publisher will recall the idea to Hilaire Belloc’s remembrance.

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Another interesting person who came for an after-dinner smoke in the old library at Holywell was an olive-complexioned youth who played divinely and was a delightful raconteur. As in the case of Belloc, we entertained a future celebrity unawares, for he was none other than Peter Paul Rubens, who has gladdened so many ears with his lilting melodies in the musical comedies associated with his name.

Notwithstanding these happy exceptions, I was bored to death by my life at Oxford. My husband's family were very kind and considerate towards me, but I was already beginning to reap my harvest of tares. I have often seriously thought that it would have been a good thing for me if I had been drowned at birth like a superfluous kitten, and most assuredly my name ought to have been Ishmael instead of Maude. I was mistrustful of life, as I had never forgotten how I had been hurt by it. I did not regard myself in the light of a martyr, but I accepted the fact that I was one of Nature's Mistakes, and I grimly resolved to dree my weird uncomplainingly. I did not know what real love signified—passion only sickened me—and I was curiously indifferent to my present fate. My sorrows, fortunately for myself, have never become my hobbies, and the mention of the homely word recalls a story which a Roman Catholic priest told me concerning one of his parishioners.

This old man was a confirmed grumbler who suffered from acute rheumatism, and whenever the priest chanced to visit him, he inveighed bitterly against the cruelty of the Creator who permitted rheumatism to rack the bones of the aged.

"Now, Cassidy," reproved the good Father, "I don't like to hear this constant grumbling. What,

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after all, is your pain in comparison with the agonies endured by the blessed martyrs? Think of them," he added, as holy zeal inspired his words, "think of that noble army, who were tortured without uttering a word of complaint! Some of them were plunged into boiling oil, others were devoured slowly by the wild beasts, many were crucified—but is it not recorded that they glorified in their sufferings? Why then rebel at such a trifle as rheumatism?"

He paused. Probably he expected Cassidy to see presently, with the eye of faith, the palm of martyrdom which is the reward of uncomplaining merit. But the old man was not of the stuff of which saints are composed, and very crossly he grunted:

"Shure, an' I'm not sayin' a wurrd against all you're tellin' me. But the sufferin's of thim martyrs don't count nothin', you see, it was just their hobby. Rheumatism ain't a hobby of mine."

Thus, I have never made a hobby of having been misunderstood during the greater part of my life; in fact, I have found a distinct pleasure in analysing my faults and failings, and I have always constituted myself as my most merciless judge.

I now had to face the unpleasant truth that, although my husband and I never indulged in re-criminations, we were absolutely unsuited to each other; we gradually drifted farther and farther apart, and I felt sure that one day I should leave my present conditions of life and face the world once more alone.

I led an uneventful existence during this period, but I remember one happy evening which I passed behind the scenes at the Lyceum Theatre. Ellen Terry, who had known of me when she lived at Win-

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chelsea, was kind enough to invite me to see her in her dressing-room during the performance of *Robespierre*, and I shall not easily forget her.

The impression given me by the great actress was one of singular charm. She is so womanly that she seems to radiate goodness whenever she speaks; she is comforting, gracious, restful—all the essentials of the ideal woman which make Ellen Terry so universally beloved. I remember that her dressing-room was upholstered in fresh blue-and-white figured cretonne, and that there were homely flowers in old china jars—just the sort of room one would expect to find in the country, certainly not in a theatre right in the heart of the busy Strand.

I witnessed some of the play from a chair placed in the wings, and I remember how much it appealed to me, and when I saw Henry Irving's delineation of Robespierre my thoughts went back to St. Omer, and to the coveted letter which I had so weakly relinquished for the unsatisfactory hat.

I drearily reflected, as I wended my way homewards, that hitherto I always seemed to have exchanged my troubles for a worse condition of things. I might have had gipsy blood in my veins, I was so restless and impatient of restraint; I did not understand myself, and at times I really feared the dangers of my own temperament. One thing I had now determined upon, and that was to ask my husband to let me take up my life alone. I knew that he would not suffer by my loss; I was dead to him as a woman and as a wife, because I had now ceased to interest him in either capacity.

So I resolved to waste no time in carrying out my project; and, as I had anticipated, Charles Ffoulkes

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wisely agreed to take the high road if I took the low road, and we discussed the future with a calmness that made me shiver at the ways of married people who are heartily sick of each other.

I did not want to live quite by myself, so I went to see some rooms near where my old friend Kate Marshall lived, and we afterwards talked over what would be the best thing for me to do.

“Life’s hard enough,” I said bitterly; “it hasn’t changed for the better since you and I were at Drury Lane ten years ago. I don’t feel inclined at the moment for fighting; I’ve half a mind to go to the devil, and see if I can’t make a success as a bad lot! There’s apparently not much satisfaction to be obtained from being ‘respectable.’”

Kate was shocked. “I think you are too ‘odd’ to have a good time if you went the pace,” she answered; “some women make fools of men, and keep them on a string just as long as ever it suits them; but you’re so silly, you would be too honest with a man. No; that won’t do. Look here, why not go in for ‘writing’? I’m sure you’d be successful if you only gave your mind to it.”

“But I don’t know anyone who could help me,” I objected; “you must have some sort of influence behind you, if you want to make any kind of a living with your pen.”

My friend considered for a few moments, and then suddenly exclaimed:

“I know the very thing. I’ve suddenly remembered that I’ve heard Bertie talk about another ‘bookish’ person like yourself—a Mr. Nash, who lives at the Eccleston Hotel; that’s where Bertie first met him. I think he is ‘something’ in a publisher’s office,

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but I'm not certain, for, as you know, I'm not keen on business men. . . . Anyhow, we'll see what can be done, old girl, towards giving you a lift."

She was as good as her word, and a few days afterwards I received a letter from her friend, telling me that Mr. Nash would be pleased to see me if I would call at Messrs. Constable's on the following afternoon.

How history repeats itself in one's career! I believe I was equally as thrilled by this adventure as I had been at the prospect of meeting Mr. Sladen eleven years previously, and the woman of thirty-one, like the girl of twenty, was just as particular about wearing her best clothes. I knew nothing of Mr. Nash beyond what Kate had told me; but I wanted to look nice, as I knew that with the majority of men first impressions are everything.

I remember that I wore the most becoming hat which I have ever possessed, and a neat blue serge coat and skirt; I was in high spirits at the prospect of meeting someone who might chance to be interested in me, and I devoutly prayed that the unknown Mr. Nash would prove as kind and charming as my old friend Douglas Sladen.

I found Whitehall Gardens quite easily, and when I saw the house which represented Messrs. Constable's business premises I was a little in awe lest the occupants should be as dignified as the place. I timidly gave my card to a clerk, and after a few moments' delay I was shown into a well-furnished room where a young man was standing by the window. I could not at first easily discern his face, as it seemed to be enveloped in the curious glow cast by the red blind, which lent a touch of the supernatural to his

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appearance, and made an eerie appeal to my fantastic imagination.

I advanced, introduced myself, and Mr. Nash asked me to explain in what manner he could be useful to me. It was then that I felt a curious intuition which made me suddenly aware that I had now, for good or ill, arrived at the turning-point in my life; I hardly spoke, and I critically examined my interlocutor. I had the impression of a very attractive personality, combined with a subtle suggestion of much strength of character and decision of purpose; and, as I looked at Mr. Nash, I wondered of whom he so strongly reminded me. It was no living person, and as I puzzled my brain to remember why his features seemed so familiar, I suddenly recollected who was Mr. Nash's facial counterpart. This handsome young man resembled no less a person than George IV., but not the George of Thackeray's scathing satire—that contemptible, unwieldy tailor's dummy endowed only with the passions of an animal. Mr. Nash displayed no traces of the monarch's horrible later decadence, but at the time of our first meeting he was almost exactly like the picture of the captivating young Prince of Wales—"Florizel" of Mary Robinson's ill-starred romance—the Florizel who wrote "Unalterable to my Perdita through life."

I am afraid that I must have seemed a very ill-bred person, for I allowed my interest in this modern Florizel temporarily to master my manners. Mr. Nash, however, soon put me entirely at my ease. I chatted freely with him, and he told me that Messrs. Constable's house in Whitehall Gardens had once been the home of Lord Beaconsfield (he seemed to appreciate the value of names, but who doesn't?), and drew

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my attention to the massive white marble mantel-piece, carved with clusters of grapes and vine-leaves, which was the special feature of interest in the room which he occupied in his capacity of literary adviser to the firm. Later, we walked to the Authors Club, and I was rather impressed when I noticed that my new acquaintance appeared to know most of the interesting people who, like ourselves, were having tea in the pretty drawing-room facing the river.

I had not spent such a happy afternoon for a long time, and when Mr. Nash suggested that I should dine with him and thoroughly discuss my position, I was positively in the seventh heaven of delight. I fear I must have always been rather a childish creature, because I have never lost my capacity for enjoyment; indeed, I am still able, like the children, to jump out of bed and pull up the blind when I am going for a holiday, in order to satisfy myself as to whether it will be fine for the great adventure.

We dined at Frascati's—another experience, as I possessed little or no knowledge of restaurant life; I had hitherto only occasionally lunched or dined quietly at Kettner's when I was at Drury Lane, varied by one memorable supper-party at the Savoy, when a famous beauty of musical comedy devoured the slices of lemon in her finger-bowl in the misguided belief that it was the correct thing to do.

After dinner, as the evening was fine, Mr. Nash decided to walk back with me across the Park to Onslow Place, where I was then living. It was a lovely February night, the deep sapphire sky strewn with stars, and a cold crispness in the air, which increased in intensity when once we had entered the Park and left the crowded streets behind us.

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There are memories which never lose their freshness after the lapse of years, immortal flowers which bloom for ever in the secret garden of the heart, and this evening was one of them. The longer I talked to Mr. Nash, the more I was impressed by his sterling qualities; indeed, his outlook was that of some champion of the Arthurian Age—a defender of the desolate and the oppressed.

Emboldened by kindness, my stubborn spirit crept forth and basked in the gladdening warmth of a newly-kindled interest in life, and I actually found myself telling Mr. Nash more about myself than I should ever have believed to be possible. I even went so far as to own how reckless I felt as a result of life's perversity towards me.

We were then sitting by the Serpentine; a frost-reddened moon rode high in the heavens, the air was very still, and the stars showered diamonds upon the water. I felt everything to be curiously unreal, and I believed that I must surely be dreaming until my companion's sensible words recalled me to myself. I listened gratefully as he spoke of the "things that mattered." Work, he said, was the greatest thing in the world, the one real principle of life, and the best worker is he who puts up the bravest fight.

I wondered whether Mr. Nash had been right up against Life—in fact, I asked him if he had ever practised what he now so strongly advocated. He smiled, and then told me clearly and convincingly about his early manhood, after he had left Edinburgh to seek his fortune in London, where he had at once made good. He described his strenuous life when, as the representative of Messrs. Warne, he had travelled nearly all over the United Kingdom; and directly I

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realised what this kind of work really meant, I regarded Mr. Nash with ever-increasing respect.

Suddenly the words of Sir Thomas Gravener's epitaph flashed across my mind, and I applied them instantly to the man who was giving me such wise counsel :

"A friendly man, a worthy knight,
Whose heart and mind was ever prest
To favour truth, to further right."

Would Mr. Nash be *my* friend? Was it possible that he would care to exert his influence for good over my stormy life? If once I called him friend I knew that he would never make me regret it; I had not met anyone before who seemed less capable of deceit, and I felt that he would scorn even to tell the whitest of lies. I should assuredly have to live up to an almost impossible standard to come within reach of him; but why should I not make the attempt? "*I will be good,*" I said solemnly to myself, unconsciously repeating the words of Queen Victoria when she first realised the responsibilities of Sovereignty—but in my case the words signified that I at last realised the value of true Friendship between a man and a woman.

I told Mr. Nash I wanted work, and I suggested that perhaps, through his influence, I might secure steady employment on one of the magazines devoted to women. He listened attentively, and promised to do his utmost for me, and when I bade him good night, my disappointed, soured outlook on life seemed all at once to have become a thing of the past.

I was full of confidence and courage, and I no longer feared the future. "I'll tear out the pages of ten years of my life," I decided; "I'll begin again, and

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I will never rest until I am able to repay my debt of gratitude to Eveleigh Nash for his share in my regeneration."

But I had not the slightest notion of what Destiny had in store for me; I was merely a woman with an imaginative temperament, who was about to make another experiment in independence.

CHAPTER XIII

JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE

I NOW commenced a quietly uneventful existence in rooms at Clapham, where my friend Kate Marshall and her sister had lived after leaving Cheyne Row. To my great joy, I was engaged as one of the staff of *Home Notes*, and my connection with the paper continued unbroken for ten years. I designed furniture and fancy work, I wrote little poems, and I gathered together interesting paragraphs, although I was never known to the readers of *Home Notes* as one of the "Aunts" who lend such a domestic touch to the various penny papers, and in whom so many girlish confidences are reposed.

Miss Keary, the well-known "Isobel," was editress when I first started to write for *Home Notes*, and after her marriage Jessie Adelaide Middleton took her place, which she filled so admirably until 1911. I only know Miss Keary as my very courteous "chief," but Jessie Middleton has always been one of my dearest friends. She is a most unassuming woman, and one of those sweet singers whose tender verse stirs all that is best in the imagination.

During the years that I worked under her I received so many little kindnesses that it rejoices me to make this belated acknowledgment of them, and I have not forgotten that, when I was ill and unable to work, my place was kept open for me, so I had no terrors of

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dismissal to retard my convalescence. Jessie Middleton is a clever writer, and in my opinion she is one of the best women journalists in London; my friend has also written two successful books of authentic ghost stories: "The Grey Ghost Book," followed in 1914 by "Another Grey Ghost Book." She possesses enough material to complete the trilogy, as after the publication of these stories people sent her accounts of their personal experience, and she has now a unique record of "hauntings" in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Through the good offices of Eveleigh Nash I secured an introduction to Fletcher Robinson, then editor of the *Daily Express*, and I wrote one or two articles for his paper. I remember how excited I was when I was paid the first money I had earned by journalism, but instead of saving it I improvidently purchased an engraving of Lady Hamilton to gladden my eyes when I worked in my tiny sitting-room at Clapham.

I was really ambitious to make a name for myself as a journalist, but I know that I could never have excelled in this *métier*. However, I was always on the look out for "copy," and in endeavouring to discover the sensational I am sure I once narrowly escaped a great danger. At this time public attention was occupied with what I shall term "The Housekeeper Scandal," as the papers were full of advertisements seeking young and attractive ladies to superintend the households of bachelors and widowers. So frequently did these advertisements appear that at last many people believed that they were traps to lure innocent women to their ruin, and I decided to see for myself whether such was indeed the case.

I accordingly selected an appeal for a companion-

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able lady to take charge of a doctor's establishment, as to my mind something in the blatant wording of the advertisement seemed to ring false. In a few days I received a reply to my application, and I was requested to call at a house in Union Road, Rotherhithe, on the following evening.

The locality was utterly unknown to me, and I liked it so little that when a policeman directed me to a tram which went down the Union Road, I had half a mind to give up the adventure and to return home. But I thought that it was foolish to become suddenly nervous, so I boarded the tram, and told the conductor the number in the road where I wished to get down. Hardly was I seated, than a wave of dreadful terror swept over me, *mortal terror* is the best description of my feelings, and above the fear I heard the warning voice of my subconscious self. I sat panic-stricken with fear of the unknown, and I scarcely noticed when the tram stopped at my destination.

I got out and crossed the road, when to my surprise I saw that the address mentioned in my letter was a chemist's shop! It was a most garish place, and a blaze of light displayed the corpulent bottles of red, green and purple water always associated with the locality of drugs; the window was filled with perfumes, cheap soaps, and grinning advertisements of infallible dentifrices, but it had an unfinished appearance, and the interior was hardly, so to speak, "unpacked." A small, sharp-faced boy was sitting behind the counter, and I addressed myself to him.

"Can you tell me where Dr. L—— lives?" I said. "I think I must have made a mistake in the number, as this is a shop, and not a private house."

"He lives 'ere, right enough," replied the youth,

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“and he runs this shop. Are you one of the ’ouse-keepers?”

“You might inform your master that Miss Craven is here,” I told him, and he disappeared with alacrity through a door at the back of the shop.

“Step inside, Miss,” he remarked pertly when he came back, “the gov.’s in there, ready waiting for you.”

I entered a small, untidy room, barely furnished with a wooden table, two kitchen chairs, and lit by an unshaded gas-jet. The floor was strewn with a litter of torn envelopes, letters, and innumerable photographs of women, old and young. A man of about thirty was sitting by the table, and directly I looked at him I again felt the cold fear which had possessed me in the tram.

I knew instinctively that this man was evil; his face was deathly white, with steely, ice-blue eyes, and I just caught one swift, dreadful look which vanished as quickly as it had come. Five years later, when I read Algernon Blackwood’s story of Max Hensig, I knew that he had described the very man I had seen in that photograph-strewn parlour, and I have always wondered whether the New York poisoner and the Rotherhithe doctor were one and the same person.

The doctor wore an all-black suit which accentuated the pallor of his face, and his long, cruel fingers closed like a vice over mine when I extended my hand. He wasted no time in preliminaries, and told me that he liked the tone of my letter. “Besides,” he added, surveying me with a horrible, unblinking stare, “I now think it extremely possible that I might also like you.”

I asked him of what my duties consisted. “I had no idea,” I said, “that you lived so far from anywhere

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when I answered your advertisement, but as I have no friends in London it doesn't really matter where I live."

His face brightened, and he then explained that he was one of a syndicate who proposed to run chemists' shops in conjunction with medical practices in the poorer parts of London. "It's a paying game, we think," he continued, "but a lonely life—a lonely life, Miss Craven, when one's work is done. That is why I have advertised for a housekeeper."

I murmured some commonplace reply, and the strange individual lit a candle, saying as he did so: "Perhaps you may like to look over the house." He then led the way up an uncarpeted staircase, where our footsteps awoke the slumbering echoes, and on the first landing he paused, and smiled most evilly at me.

The air here was musty and vault-like, and the candle flickered wildly in the grip of a wind which seemed to blow from nowhere. I heard odd noises behind the woodwork, just as if the whole place was trying to protest at my presence, and I felt so dreadfully uneasy that I was glad when the doctor opened a door and said: "This is the drawing-room." I looked, but to my amazement, the room was absolutely bare of furniture. I made no remark, and we ascended another flight of uncarpeted stairs, which led to a number of unfurnished bedrooms. At last we reached the attics, one only of which was furnished. "My room," said my guide, indicating it with a wave of his hand.

I was so astonished that I could not help saying what came uppermost in my mind. "Why," I cried, "you don't want a housekeeper in an empty house, there's nothing for her to do."

"The furniture is already ordered, and it will be

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here in a few days," he replied. We then went back to the over-heated room at the back of the shop, and the doctor asked me whether I felt inclined to manage his house. By this time the spirit of adventure rose high within me. "Well," I told him, "I must think it over; let me come and see you again."

"Excellent; come at the same time any evening next week," he agreed; and after a little desultory conversation I bade him good night.

He came through the shop with me, and I could have believed that the pert boy behind the counter looked a little uneasy when he encountered his employer's strange meditative eyes. Then for the first time I breathed freely when I knew that I was out in the kindly night, away from the echoing house and its sinister occupant.

For two or three days I was uncertain whether I would return as I had promised, but eventually my curiosity prevailed over my discretion; I went back to Union Road, when the events of my previous visit were repeated. Again I experienced that sickening sensation of fear, again I walked through the warning, watchful house, and again I knew that the man in black was something excessively evil. This time, however, I promised definitely to become his house-keeper, as I knew that the end of the adventure was not yet, and I grimly determined to see it through.

"I will write to you," he told me, "but please come here for good next Wednesday without fail." Two days later he suddenly came to Clapham, and left word that I was not to go to Rotherhithe on Wednesday. There was no other explanation, and after a fortnight had passed I wrote to him, but my letter, which had been sent from Union Road to an address

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in the Minorities, was returned, "Address not known." Consumed with curiosity, I determined to revisit the mysterious house; but the shop was closed, the shutters were up, and all that I could find out was that the doctor had mysteriously disappeared.

I often wondered what constituted the mystery, because I am certain that one existed, and I am also certain that I narrowly escaped losing my life. But London teems with hidden secrets, and this experience of mine was one of them.

After this search for sensational copy I decided to leave journalism alone, as Mr. Nash had now introduced me to Mrs. B. M. Croker, the well-known novelist, who wanted someone to assist her for a few weeks in secretarial work. I found Mrs. Croker charming and large-hearted, and she was one of the most handsome women I have ever seen; she reminded me of an aristocrat of the old regime, and I never tired of admiring her fine face with the wonderful eyes that are such an index of her varied emotions.

I always look upon Mrs. Croker (Mrs. Henry Wood alone excepted) as the story-teller who has made the strongest appeal to the minds of young girls. I have never met one who did not adore Mrs. Croker's books, and discuss her heroines as if they were actually living people; her absolutely nice mind is reflected in all that she writes, and her complete understanding of the thousand and one little economies practised by the "hard-up" girl constitutes another bond of sympathy between her and her readers.

There is not the slightest doubt that Mr. Nash did his utmost to help me in my work, and he made my life much brighter in many ways. Twice a week he came to have tea with me, and I relied upon his

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judgment so much that at last I never did anything without having previously asked his advice. He was so reliable, so kind, and I gained much from his wider knowledge of life.

I worked for the *Printseller* in the autumn of 1903, when amongst other articles I wrote one which dealt with ancient needlework; and, through the kindness of the librarian of the British Museum, I made the acquaintance of Mrs. Lilla Hailstone, who possessed a wonderful collection of samplers and Stuart needlework pictures. Mrs. Hailstone was a rather eccentric but a most kind-hearted woman, and I often went to see her at the big corner house where she lived at Elm Park Gardens. She had not had a happy life, and there were constant disputes which further embittered it; in fact, she told me that the wrought-iron gates across the portico of her house had been put there to prevent certain people from forcing themselves upon her, and everyone who called had first to pass the ordeal of the locked gates before they were finally admitted inside.

Mrs. Hailstone's house was really like a museum, and I was much interested in her beautiful possessions; it is only a few years since she died, and her treasured collection is dispersed to the four corners of the earth, the iron gates are flung wide open—nobody can disturb her now.

I left Clapham in 1903, and took a tiny flat near the Middlesex Hospital in order to have a home of my own. It was rather a strain upon my slender income, but I was not afraid, although I had not been many weeks in Candover Street before I realised that it would mean a hard struggle to provide butter for my daily bread. I asked help from no one; I did not spoil my friendship with Eveleigh Nash by intro-

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ducing the question of pounds, shillings and pence, and I kept my stringent economies absolutely to myself. But the long, cold winter at last made me look upon gas and firing as two insatiable monsters who devoured most of my resources, once I had paid the rent and the wages of the woman who "did" for me.

I believe that it is a good thing to wrestle with life, as it engenders a curious capacity for endurance. When I review the past I sometimes wonder how I have ever gone through so much, but there is undoubtedly a strange joy in fighting for one's very existence inch by inch.

There were moments, however, when I longed to have the responsibilities of life lifted from off my shoulders, to feel I had not to worry about money, and to experience the joy of being able to afford the luxury of a headache without trembling lest it would prevent my working, or that it might even be a prelude to some more serious ailment.

Mr. Nash was now a publisher, and no longer a literary adviser. I liked to go to his office in Bedford Street, Strand, where I heard all the latest gossip about books and authors; in fact, I read occasional manuscripts for him, and I think my opinion of a book of Tom Gallon's first induced Mr. Nash to consider me in the light of "reader" to the firm.

But when I went back to my flat I felt horribly alone; it was unbearable to open the door and find nobody to welcome me, perhaps the fire had gone out, and the cold air struck me in reproof for my forgetfulness. When I was very tired, and had to make my own tea, the kettle seemed to take an unaccountable time to boil; in fact, I sometimes simply hadn't the heart even to cut myself any bread and butter.

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One rainy afternoon I was returning home feeling so completely out of sorts, and so obsessed with desire for companionship, that I actually became a thief. I stole a kitten—a little, wet, black atom, who was sheltering in a doorway—and, regardless of the rights of ownership, I picked up the kitten, put it under my coat, and bore it home in triumph.

It may appear strange that I led such an isolated life, but one of the reasons for my solitude lay in the fact that I was morbidly sensitive over my failure as Mrs. Ffoulkes. I hated to think that people might be surmising things for which there was no foundation, and I therefore deliberately cut myself off from all those who had known me in the past. I never saw my husband, and, although I was now reconciled to my family, I rarely went to Brighton. Mamma would occasionally call on me, but my stepfather was unaware that we met; we were not in sympathy, as, woman-like, she invariably reminded me that I had not profited much by my experiences, and, woman-like, I retaliated by pointing out that she, like her daughter, appeared to have also specialised in bad luck.

Whenever I complained of my small and often insufficient income, Mamma would urge me to live in a boarding-house at twenty-five shillings a week; but I shuddered at the prospect of inviting Mr. Nash under such unfriendly conditions; besides, how could we possibly discuss books in a drawing-room filled with chattering females? "No," I resolved, "I must retain my privacy at all costs." For I felt that I would rather starve than sacrifice the prized companionship of my few friends.

I worked harder and harder, until I became ill, and at last I took to fainting unexpectedly and seeing

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objects through a grey mist. Change of scene, rest, and good food were the things which exhausted nature demanded, and which were denied her. I vainly wished that my own people could have understood how tired I felt, but I knew that I could rightly expect no practical sympathy for an illness which I could only describe as "feeling run down."

So I continued to faint and to see life through a mist in these early days of 1904 when Spring was hesitating whether or no to make her appearance. The flower-sellers' baskets at the top of Oxford Street were now white masses of narcissi mingled with the royal purple of violets; and sometimes I used to take a handful of fragrance home with me, and tell the kitten how much I wished that he and I were in the country instead of living in this cruel city of unrest.

Then at last came darkness, and I gave up fainting because I was an unconscious creature who lay before the gates of Death waiting for them to open and admit her soul to the Paradise of Tired Toilers.

Everything possible that medical skill could suggest was done for me when once my aunts realised that I was desperately ill, and at length I crept back to life with many haltings by the way. I was, of course, obliged to have proper nursing, but when I was able to think seriously about returning home I found that I was homeless.

Relying on the doctors' verdict that in my case recovery was impossible, Mamma had acted on her own initiative, terminated the tenancy of my flat, and—worst blow of all—had disposed of the furniture which I had been at such pains to acquire. I had now nothing in the world which I could call my own.

CHAPTER XIV

AN IDEAL PARTNERSHIP

ALTHOUGH I was temporarily disconcerted at the loss of my little flat, the hard Yorkshire strain in me bade me make another stand against life and begin all over again.

Directly I was strong enough to travel I went to stay in rooms at Brighton, and I spent a good deal of my time at Wellesley House. I did not propose myself as a visitor, because my family were nervous of any kind of illness, and more especially of one without a more distinguished name than that of "brain fag."

My old home seemed strange without Grand-mamma, and I always associated the morning-room with her as I had last seen her, six years before, lying in her coffin enshrouded in beautiful lace. Aunt Eliza was kind to me, but I never could confide in my own people; it is a strange form of nervousness which I have never lost, and sometimes I have attributed this distressing phase to the self-consciousness which invariably makes me feel like a cuckoo in the family nest. I have always been fond of Aunt Eliza, partly because she appealed to my sense of beauty as a lovely woman, and also because of her self-denying devotion to her father and mother. Aunt Mary inspired feelings of awe within me, and as I was once desperately rude to her, she has, very rightly, never been able to look upon me with any degree of affection.

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It was not, however, until I met one of my cousins that I was able to realise how greatly my adventures had put me beyond the pale of family recognition. I had not seen her since I was a girl, and I found her little changed, except that, if possible, my cousin seemed a shade nearer perfection than she had been sixteen years previously. She looked the picture of neatness in a short, sensible skirt and a Viyella shirt-b blouse with the whitest of collars and the most correct of ties, whereas I wore a slightly theatrical scarlet crêpe blouse, chosen to comfort the pallor of illness, but whose shape and colour were reminiscent of the garment worn by Charlotte Corday on the day of her execution.

With my uncanny appreciation of the value of contrasts, I knew that I looked oddly unsuitable to be a near relation of the self-possessed woman who asked me whether I felt better, and then never addressed me again. "It's worth much to be a philosopher," I reflected, when I grasped the fact that I had really become an outcast—a tolerated one, perhaps, but still a person not to be seriously regarded even as a cousin.

After my return to London, my life, thanks to the kindness of my aunts, brightened considerably, as they now made me an allowance sufficient to render work less of a necessity. It was a generous action, and I doubly appreciated the kindness because I was aware that I had, in many ways, been a source of anxiety to my family. They really could not be expected to like me or to understand me, any more than I should appreciate a conventional, unemotional niece, if I were to become an aunt and have such a one thrust upon me.

I now read, worked, and made many good resolu-

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tions, for was I not at last fortunate after a period of black and unchanging bad luck? I had some real pleasure in life, as my friendship with Eveleigh Nash continued undisturbed, and I took an active interest in all that concerned him and his business.

I occasionally went to the Park on Sunday with him, but I felt at first like the "clown" dog in a troupe of well-trained performing poodles. I often wished that I could speak in the way which seems to stamp the well-bred woman of society, and my failure to do so was a real grief to me, as Eveleigh Nash often told me that my accent slightly recalled that associated with those unlucky people born within the sound of Bow Bells.

Thus my quiet, happy life continued from day to day; I still wrote for the *Printseller*, and I also contributed an illustrated article to the Christmas number of *The Queen*, in which I described the treatment of the Nativity by celebrated artists. In order to familiarise myself with details, I spent hours in the National Gallery studying Italian Art, which has always made such an appeal to my imagination.

That winter was memorable for me, inasmuch as it marked my discovery of the work of Algernon Blackwood under rather trying conditions of life. I was in the throes of a violent influenza cold when Eveleigh Nash asked for an opinion of a typescript, entitled "The Empty House," which the late Angus Hamilton had sent on behalf of his friend, Mr. Blackwood. I was half inclined to leave it unread until I was better, but when I glanced down the first page I paused breathless, because it was suddenly borne upon me that this was the work of a genius!

I forgot all about my horrible cold and my

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general discomfort as I read page after page, at first entranced, then frightened and fascinated by the realistic horror of the book. I was unable to put it down until I had read every word, and then my imagination was so strung up that I almost shrieked at the sound of my own prosaic sneeze, and I kept the light in my room burning brightly all night.

The next day when I saw Eveleigh Nash I was full of enthusiasm. "Here is a 'find' worth keeping," I said; "depend upon it, this new author, whoever he may be, is a genius, and if I possessed a fortune I would cheerfully wager every penny of it that he will go far, and make an unassailable position for himself in Literature; I know that here is the *real* thing. For Heaven's sake, don't miss the book, because it will be a long time before you will ever meet with another Algernon Blackwood."

"The Empty House" was therefore accepted upon this belief of mine, and Hilaire Belloc first drew attention to its merits in the *Morning Post*, although the *Spectator* also noticed it at length. But it was not until two years afterwards that I made Mr. Blackwood's acquaintance, and became so deeply in sympathy with his later work.

In September, 1906, my first book, "Famous Beauties of Two Reigns," was published by Eveleigh Nash, who spared no expense over its production, and even persuaded his friend, the late Major Martin Hume, to write the introduction, entitled "Fashions in Femininity." I was very grateful to the well-known historian for this act of kindness, more especially as I did not like Major Hume, and I am sure that he tolerated me solely out of consideration for Eveleigh Nash.

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Major Hume was the most studiously accurate person I have ever encountered, and I really believe that he even thought by rule, as he never deviated from certain fixed laws of life, and he was an absolute slave to social convention. His reputation as an historian, the responsible position which he held at the Record Office, and his precise and slightly pompous individuality combined to make him a power in his own circle, and I always think that he exercised a great deal of influence over the character of Eveleigh Nash, to whom correctness of every kind was almost a fetish.

It will be long before historical literature produces anyone to equal Martin Hume. When he allowed himself to unbend he could write delightfully from the human standpoint, rather than as merely the historian whose facts were never at fault, and whose lynx eye unmercifully laid bare the inaccuracies of his contemporaries.

He was a tall, dark, stoutish man, of a type which is admired by some women (indeed, Lady Cardigan told me that she thought Major Hume was one of the handsomest men she had ever seen); but to me he always appeared as if he were hovering on the brink of an attack of jaundice, an effect due, perhaps, to his almost Spanish swarthiness of complexion.

I am afraid that Martin Hume did not approve of my friendship with Eveleigh Nash; I don't think I was sufficiently recognised by "Society" to make me desirable; but he was quite pleasant on the rare occasions when we met, and I shall not easily forget the day when he drove with us to Hampton Court, shortly before the publication of "Famous Beauties."

We lunched at "The Mitre," and afterwards went to look at the Lely portraits of the frail ladies so

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beloved by Charles II.; but it struck me that the Major did not interest himself in the beautiful portraits as works of art; he merely looked upon them as pictorial representations of historical facts, and nothing else.

His unappreciative attitude chilled me, and I was glad to get out into the lovely old gardens, then in all their glory of colour and perfume. As we passed the tree-bordered portion of the grounds known as "Queen Mary's Walk" I paused, and my love of romance overcame my childish fear of Martin Hume. "Oh!" I exclaimed, "how picturesque Queen Mary must have looked when she walked up and down under the trees on a day like this."

"Eh . . . what was that, Mrs. Ffoulkes?" asked the Major, who was slightly deaf.

I repeated my words, and Martin Hume regarded me with accusing gravity.

"You say, Mrs. Ffoulkes, that this is Queen Mary's Walk. Have you any documentary evidence to prove the truth of your assertion?"

I had *not*, so I was completely snubbed; and no doubt Major Hume would have demanded to see the title deeds of the Garden of Eden before he would have acknowledged that such a place had any right to be mentioned as having actually existed.

He was a strange man, and he greatly coveted my beloved Berkeley Cottage, which at last he looked upon as a sort of Naboth's Vineyard. He was always asking me whether I was tired of it, and if I wished to relinquish my tenancy; and a fortnight before he died I saw him walking down Jones Street, wishing, I am sure, that the cottage was his own property. It was in connection with this curious fancy that I experienced

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the startling adventure which occurred two or three days after his death, although, at the time, I did not even know that he was ill. One afternoon I was sitting on the window-seat in the dining-room, when I suddenly noticed Major Hume looking curiously at the little house. Never doubting that he was coming to see me, I ran to the front door expecting to find him waiting outside, but instead I saw him, as I thought, going slowly down Bourdon Street, and, as I stood on the doorstep watching the retreating figure, it suddenly vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed it up.

I puzzled my brains over this odd occurrence until I heard of Major Hume's death, when I wondered no longer. He had always openly avowed his affection for the things of this world—indeed, he had even said many times that he especially wished that his spirit might be permitted to re-visit his favourite reading-room in the Devonshire Club—and, believing as I do in the theory that certain spirits are earthbound, I have no doubt whatever in my own mind that I saw the spirit of Martin Hume, attracted as of old to the house which he had so ardently desired.

There was a grim irony in the circumstances which attended Major Hume's illness and death. He was a reticent man, and the news that he had died suddenly at the house of a relative in the Romford Road came rather as a surprise, since one would never have supposed the Major to have stayed anywhere east of Mayfair.

He was buried in the cemetery near the place where he died—another shock to his acquaintances, since it was impossible to dissociate the dead man from sepulture in Brompton or Kensal Green! But he had a

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most impressive funeral, and his coffin was covered with an abundance of floral souvenirs sent by the King of Spain, various members of the aristocracy, and his many friends at the Devonshire Club.

Some weeks after Major Hume's death I went with Eveleigh Nash to see his last resting-place. Our way lay through the heart of the City and the busy Whitechapel Road, and at last the taxi stopped in front of some large iron gates, where numerous vendors of flowers pressed us to buy bunches of drooping white chrysanthemums and tired-looking roses. Inside the cemetery the gravel was almost as rough as sea shingle, and the air was full of a horrible smell of new black whenever we passed the various mourners, who were literally swathed in crape and whose floating veils recalled flags at half-mast high.

There was nothing beautiful or dignified in this crowded cemetery, and I never saw so many watering-cans or so many jam-jars of flowers in my life. The graves nearly all boldly advertised the name of the monumental mason in conjunction with that of the deceased, and in some cases the family profession was boldly blazoned at the bottom of the tombstone. I sighed when I thought how Major Hume would have wished to lie surrounded by the well-born people with whom, in life, he had been on visiting terms; this mixed *milieu* would have absolutely outraged his decorous sense of the fitness of things.

His grave was impeccable, but I could not help thinking that the King of Terrors had been no respecter of the Historian of Kings, and that all his earthly ambitions had passed into nothingness when once he heard the feet of Death approaching.

In the summer of 1907 I went to stay at a delightful

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house at Welwyn, known as "The Châlet," which the former owner had built on Japanese lines for his wife, who was a native of Japan. The gardens were lovely, and there were many lily-covered ponds and stone bridges designed to recall the charms of her own land to the pretty little lady, who was, however, unable to reside permanently in England.

During this holiday I realised the truth of the saying that "Fortunes are wont to change suddenly," as mine changed for the better in the most unexpected manner. Through the kindness of an old friend, who believed that I should achieve great things if once I obtained my chance in life, I was enabled to buy a half-share in the business of Eveleigh Nash and to become a partner with him.

This sudden uplifting at first almost bewildered me. I could not realise that I, Maude Ffoulkes, who had hitherto received more kicks from Fate than halfpence, was at last to take up an assured position in life. It seemed ideal that Eveleigh Nash and myself should become partners in business as well as in friendship, and I remember walking with him in the garden at Welwyn and telling him how I would devote my intellect and my whole life to his interests. I never smell the almond odour of sweet peas without recalling that time, for there were hedges of the lovely blossoms, and the evening air was heavy with their perfume.

We signed the deed of partnership in September, 1907. My lawyers looked upon my new venture as quite a sound speculation, but to me it was rather a solemn occasion, because I was entrusting all my worldly wealth to the keeping of my friend. I had no fears, as I believed that Eveleigh Nash, who knew better than anyone what privations I had once endured,

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would most assuredly shelter me in the future from any further anxieties.

Frederick Cousins, my valued friend of many years, witnessed our signatures, and then I looked out over the little forgotten City graveyard which faces Pancras Lane with my heart too full for words.

I found myself reviewing the years that had passed since the day when I first ran away to seek my fortune. I saw myself once more on the stage, and again, in fancy, I sat in the smoky kitchen at Beaufort Street on my wedding morning. Then I recollected my meeting with Eveleigh Nash, his words of advice, and his promise of friendship.

He had kept his promise, and through him I had been enabled to rise to better things instead of sinking into one dull level of despair. I turned impulsively to Mr. Cousins and Eveleigh Nash.

“I think this is the most wonderful day in my whole life,” I said, with glistening eyes.

CHAPTER XV

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

I HAVE always looked upon the first few years of my partnership with Eveleigh Nash as the happiest time of my life; in fact, sometimes I was so happy that I was almost afraid it was all too good to be true, and that I should suddenly be transformed into my former rôle of Cinderella.

The lease of the premises at 32 Bedford Street, Strand, where my friend first commenced the business of a publisher, had now expired, and he removed to 36 King Street, Covent Garden, where he was fortunate enough to secure one of the mansions which were built in the days when Covent Garden was a fashionable part of London.

Eveleigh Nash named the new premises Fawside House, after the Tower of Fawside, which, four hundred years ago, belonged to the Fawsides, from whom his mother was descended. I had visited the ruin, of which only some walls and a part of the tower remain, when I was once staying at Dunbar, and Eveleigh Nash had come through from Edinburgh to see me for a few hours on his way to London.

I thought that this was a most opportune moment to ask him to show me Fawside, as I had been reading "Mary of Lorraine," and I was full of the story of Tranent. It was a lovely summer's day when we climbed the hill-road which leads to the tower, the

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hedgerows were gay with flowers, and the air was full of the song of birds; the view was grand, and the keen wind from the Solway Firth sang the song of past battles to the crumbling walls. A shepherd with a most human-looking collie was tending his flock in the field behind the tower, and I spoke to him concerning the history of the place. To my surprise, he was a romantic-minded Scotsman, and we chatted for some time about the legends of that part of the country, with which he appeared to be thoroughly familiar.

After we left Fawside we went to see the curious old church of Tranent. The ancient kirkyard reminded me of the one described by Halliwell Sutcliffe in "The Sexton's Story," and I was almost uncannily fascinated by the wind-swept spot, with its forgotten graves and their barely decipherable inscriptions. The weather had suddenly changed, and the skies were now grey and lowering; a misty rain was blowing from the sea, and a veil of melancholy memories seemed to hang over the lonely church and its lonely dead.

As we left Tranent, rain commenced to fall heavily—it was no longer a mist, but a deluge—and by the time we reached the station I was wet through. We had to wait an hour for our train, and the hospitable stationmaster insisted upon our going into his warm kitchen, where I dried my clothes, drank hot tea, and ate delicious bannocks which his daughter had made. The stationmaster was a quaint person, and when Eveleigh Nash thanked him for our timely shelter, he remarked tersely: "It's no' you but the leddy that I was considerin'."

With these memories of one summer's day, I was naturally glad to see again the name of Fawside, if

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only in connection with the house in King Street, and I augured great luck through the association. By this time I had met several of the authors whose books were introduced to the public by Eveleigh Nash, and last, but not least, I made the acquaintance of Algernon Blackwood.

Mr. Blackwood's first successful book had been followed by "The Listener," a collection of short stories which were unanimously praised by the critics as being something unique of their kind. In those days Algernon Blackwood specialised more in studies of fear and horror than he does now, when his outlook has widened and deepened to interpret the universe via mystical dreams on more majestic lines.

There is a wide gulf between these first books and those of to-day, and it is impossible to compare them, but in my opinion he has never bettered some of his early stories. "The Willows" is a masterpiece, "Max Hensig" I consider to be another, and "The Listener" almost equals it in dramatic intensity.

Directly I met Mr. Blackwood I hoped that he and I would become friends, because I knew that this man, with the passionless, grave face of an Egyptian priest, understood my soul better than I did myself, and that I could now talk to someone else who had escaped from a cage. I gradually became aware that he, too, had been up against Life; indeed, I afterwards discovered that during the very year of my flight from home he had been fighting for a bare existence in New York. But Algernon Blackwood never spoke bitterly of his experiences; his aloofness from material things made him impervious to those petty troubles which seem overwhelming disasters to the ordinary human

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being. He saw them against the background of Eternity, comparatively trivial; he saw them in proportion. Magical, comforting secret—right proportion.

But when he talked in his wonderful way, I began to understand how narrow my outlook was and how unworthy were many of my actions. I felt ashamed of my mean little soul when I compared it with the grand outlook of this strange man whose spirit soared beyond the stars.

As I began to know him better I was able to confide in him something of my own inner tendencies, and the luring fascination which the so-called occult had always exercised upon my imagination. I knew intuitively that he would never laugh or call me silly.

It was Algernon Blackwood who first made me appreciate the pathetic beauty of "The Gateless Barrier" and "A Beleaguered City," and he then introduced me to the delightful and gracious genius of Henry Nevinson, whose "Plea of Pan" is to me what daily Scriptural reading is to other people. He revealed to me the genius of Arthur Machen, whose writings touched some responsive chord within me, and in some dim, far-away age I seemed to have known all the horrors and the wild pagan joy which he has described in "The Great God Pan."

My friendship with Algernon Blackwood has exercised a far-reaching influence over my mind, and it has never lost the first intensity of its early days. I ceased to rail openly at the injustice and hypocrisy of the world, because I now learned the possibility of detaching oneself in spirit from the banalities of life, and I was able at will to draw down "the blinds of make-believe" and temporarily shut out the noise and glare of daily existence; I, too, was learning to see

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the ills of life in saner proportion. My friend seemed one of those encased "in an enchanted and many-coloured shrine holding them uncontaminated and undistressed amid the common dullness," and Algernon Blackwood was also one of the fortunate beings who, "on the other side of custom's thick-set hedge, are able to see the gleaming eyes of wild spirits."

I never tired of listening to his description of his journeyings into the wilderness. He related the wonders of a long canoe journey down the Danube, where the great river races savagely between black and dreadful cliffs and flows past haunted islands, the scene of his wonderful story of "The Willows." He told me about other almost unknown islands in the Baltic, where he had once spent a summer, and I thrilled when he fired my imagination over the glories of the Caucasus, where the mountains are aflame with purple and scarlet rhododendrons, and, if you listen in the still and lovely twilight, you can still catch the dim thunder of mighty hoofs as the Centaur herds pass galloping across the ancient solitudes.

Two letters of Algernon Blackwood's lie before me as I write, and I think I may be forgiven if I quote part of one, as it is so characteristic of the writer :

"England and English life [he wrote from Scutari] has faded so completely from my mind that it seems as though I had never known it—in any case, its hold upon my imagination is very slight, as you know. I loathe the Riviera Coast from Marseilles ; it seems artificial, like a great hot rock garden with a few palms thrown in, and the reek of its vulgar and fashionable population comes out even to sea.

"Naples I like, though the blue is too sweet and universal, and the world of flowers in the gardens ends by surfeiting. Wandering behind the Posilipo Hill, I came across a Greek mausoleum, unfinished, growing in a deserted plot with blocks of stone

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lying among the flowers and tall grasses. It was most refreshing, for its severity of line and massive roof were like a tonic amid all the lyrical sweetness.

"A great dome, marked and blotched like a full moon at dawn, rose above the temple, and over the door stretched those sombre Egyptian wings with the serpents interlaced between them. But it was two 12-foot figures in the porch that fascinated me away into an older world—huge, with hands clasped across the breast, the bodies wrapped in giant palm leaves, the heads thrown back proudly, and the metal eyes gone blind—blind to the banal modern world because they saw inwards and backwards—towards the Immensities within.

"The splendid solemnity of these figures was most impressive, their inscrutable faces gazing eternally across the blue bay; for the imagination went back, in a giant leap, far beyond the classical days to the hoary civilisations that were still earlier. This lonely mausoleum was ruined, and flowers and weeds grew among the cracks of the stones, and lizards ran all over the hot steps."

This beautiful word-picture has made me value the letter, but a whimsical reason has also prevented my destroying it. I think it is so typical of Algernon Blackwood that he never mentioned the names of any of his fellow-travellers on the N.D.L. *Bremen*; I don't believe that he even noticed they existed! Another man would have filled pages with accounts of the pretty girls on board and boasted about his skill at deck quoits, or else described the usual fancy-dress ball and concert without which no sea voyage is considered to be complete.

I went through all the stories which appeared in Algernon Blackwood's well-known book, "John Silence," with him. He read them aloud to me, one by one, and a strange thing happened in connection with "Ancient Sorceries," which, in my opinion, is one of the best "experiences" in the volume. I was absolutely fascinated by the account of the "cat town" upon whose ramparts Ilsé met the drab-souled

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little tourist and almost prevailed upon him to join the Witches' Sabbath in the valley below. So vividly was this impressed upon my imagination that I determined to make Algernon Blackwood a present of a water-colour drawing of the incident, exactly as he had described it to me.

I accordingly asked Stephen Reid (who was doing some illustration work for Eveleigh Nash) to come and see me, and I said that I would be very grateful if he would execute my small commission. I gave him a rough plan which I had made of the place, with its cathedral brooding over the town like a crouching cat, and the ramparts which looked down on the plane trees, far away to the open space sacred to the Witches and their sinister Master. Stephen Reid was very interested, and I was full of the story, more especially as the spell of Algernon Blackwood's description was still fresh in my mind. Stephen Reid accordingly evolved the picture which is reproduced here, and which, apart from its artistic value, represents a genuine case of thought-transmission. I had fancied the town described an imaginary one. Algernon Blackwood, however, told me that it was Laon (now, as I write, in German hands), and that his story was based upon an experience of his own when staying at the Inn "de la Hure," which figure in the tale. His strong imagination seemed to visualise the scene so vividly in my own mind that I not only saw it clearly myself, but was able to pass on the picture in sharpest detail to the artist. Stephen Reid had neither visited Laon nor read the story, yet everyone who knows the town can recognise it from the drawing, and the only slight error, I believe, consists in some trivial details of the stonework on the ramparts.



"CAT TOWN"

Drawn by Stephen Reid in illustration of Algernon Blackwood's
Ancient Societies ("John Silence")

Algernon Blackwood

At the time of the publication of "John Silence" my friend was living in Moore Street, Cadogan Place, and here I first became acquainted with one of the most singular people I have ever met, who was none other than Alfred H. Louis, the original of Daniel Deronda, and the "Old Man of Visions" in "The Listener."

Mr. Louis was an amazing person, and he at once made me sensible of his tremendous intellect, although at the same time I was impressed by the atmosphere of tragedy which enveloped him. In appearance he was a little, frail old man, dressed in a shabby coat, and, regardless of accepted fashions in footgear, Mr. Louis wore evening pumps instead of boots! But he was wonderful; I have rarely heard such beautiful thoughts so beautifully expressed, and again the truth was forced upon me that all my cleverness and my imagination were worthless in comparison with those of Algernon Blackwood and this dreamer of dreams who was so far above the sordid happenings of life.

I appreciated Mr. Louis's friendship, and when I decided to write my own experiences, my thoughts at once reverted to the strange and wonderful old man I had known at Moore Street, and I asked Algernon Blackwood to give me some particulars of his friendship with him. I cannot do better than quote his reply, because it presents a vivid picture of a sombre and tragic personality, and it may also serve to elucidate some of the mystery connected with the life of a man who, to the best of my knowledge and belief, was at one time well known in literary and political circles.

"Alfred H. Louis comes of a family, I believe, in

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the Midlands," wrote Algernon Blackwood, "but my information about him is mostly hearsay, and I lay claim to no absolutely authentic information. His father was a scholar and a hunting man. He was very precocious as a child. The family is Jewish, and proud of it.

"His career at Cambridge was distinguished, and he was very prominent in the debates when Sir William Harcourt was President. He was called to the Bar (Middle Temple), and Bentley published his first book, 'England's Foreign Policy,' in 1869. According to his story, his intense desire to enter Parliament was thwarted by Gladstone, who said, 'Louis is too in earnest to come among us.' There was no compromise in Louis, and he was terrifically in earnest.

"He accordingly shook the dust of England from his feet and went to New Zealand, where he practised at the Bar; he also went to India. He hid himself from public life at home. It is said that there was a tragedy behind this step, but, if so, its nature remains a mystery. The late Canon Harford, of Westminster, and Archbishop Benson knew what the story was, but the former, whom I knew intimately, never betrayed it, and in Benson's (*filis*) biography of the Archbishop there is only a reference to Louis's influence upon him.

"I first met Louis in New York in 1894. He was living upon the kindness of a few friends in an attic, concerning himself with nothing in life but the study of law, politics, and—the production of occasional poems of a singular beauty. The logical and legal intellect in him was as strong as the poet and musician—he was a pupil of Sterndale Bennett—and both were of exceptional power and brilliance. To money, fame,

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and the rewards of this world he was divinely indifferent, living on a most exalted plane, rising always at dawn, walking the streets in a shabby green frock-coat, no tie, old boots, taking no more than coffee at daybreak, and generally conscious only of the eternal verities and those questions of supreme importance commonly supposed to deal with the soul, whether of individuals or of nations. His conversation was marvellous, his memory never at fault, his power of quotation superb; his knowledge of law and history, of literature (Continental as well as English), was only equalled by his passionate devotion to the Muses, in poetry, art and music; and in argument and in dialectics he was a most formidable and uncompromising antagonist. I was on the staff of the *New York Sun* in those days, and introduced him to a club of newspaper men who spent Saturday nights discussing events of the time. Louis held his own against a general attack (on England's attitude to the world) with a brilliance and a smashing superiority that amazed me as I listened. His accurate memory, his eloquent analysis, his knowledge of history, international law, of politics and personalities silenced one and all. He tired out the lot of them, and among them were some keen intellects.

"But it was the poetry in him that chiefly attracted me, side by side with the sense of sombre and mysterious tragedy that hung about him. One felt here the wreck of a big intellect, the ruin of something more than a big intellect—a big Man. It was intensely sad. He spoke little of his past, but the passion, the sacrifice, the resignation in his poetry betrayed him. He sold occasionally to *Harper's* or the *Atlantic Monthly* sonnets and lyrics of rare

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beauty. Alden, then editor of *Harper's*, asked me once: 'Who is this strange being? He brings me a sonnet from time to time, parting with it as though it were his life's blood.' It was. He had an exquisite speaking voice, deep and musical, and to hear him recite his 'Night Song,' the tears streaming down his worn, thin cheeks, but his eyes aflame—it was a ritual to him—was as poignant and deep an emotional experience as I have ever known. In those days of struggle I lived in a small back room of a boarding-house that had been a butler's pantry, and meals were light and 'at uncertain hours.' My washing-place was the butler's sink; there was a folding bed. In order to get two persons in, the bed had to be pushed up against the wall; then Louis—'Padre,' as I called him to his keen delight—would enter. We made coffee—milk an occasional luxury. We talked in the dawn together, sleep all forgotten. The wonderful old man 'stretched' my little consciousness so that I forgot the world. I owe much to Louis. In 'The Listener' he is the 'Old Man of Visions,' about which he said to me, with a keen smile, one day, 'You have taken away my personality and given me a new one. Who—which—am I really?' And sometimes, in a friend's room, he would play Chopin. That was another experience by itself.

"Bit by bit I gathered hints of his past history, but never enough to frame a connected whole. I speak of it with reserve, with deep affectionate respect as well. Intense suffering had been his. Once, certainly, his mind, like many another that has shown too early brilliance, betrayed the strain; and, indeed, when I knew him, his aloofness from the sordid side of human life, his loftiness of outlook, his stern and icy morality,

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his intense and acute tenderness for others—all amounted very nearly to that state of ‘being out of relationship to its environment’ which constitutes unbalance. But everybody loved him, and he loved everybody. About his story, then—I gathered from his own words that before leaving England he had been intimate with George Eliot, a frequent visitor at her house when Lewes, Huxley, and others were of the party. He gave vivid reports of the discussions, disapproving strongly, however, of Spencer, for whose philosophy he felt unmeasured contempt, and he claimed to be, in part, the original of Daniel Deronda. Manning was also his friend; Longfellow more than friend (later, in U.S.A.). He owned and edited the *Spectator* for a short period, and was at one time well on the way to edit the *Fortnightly*, which some Jewish friends of wealth were to purchase for him. It fell through. He was married once, if not twice, and had, until recently at any rate, grown-up children, though keeping up no relationship with them.

“He came back to England in this way. A friend of mine in New York, of long connection with the Vanderbilt interests, decided to settle, for business ends of his own, in London. Before leaving New York he wished to study English law. He rented a room in a hotel at night, and Louis instructed him. The man, a fine intellect himself, described these lectures to me as the most perfect instruction he had ever known. My friend later brought him over to London.

“At one period of his life Louis became a Protestant, and was baptised into the English Church by Charles Kingsley. Later he adopted Roman Catholicism. But when I knew him he had returned

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to the Jewish faith. 'That's my home,' he said to me once as we passed a graveyard by a London synagogue. His epitaph he had already chosen. He held that half the world's troubles were due to talking! On one side of the stone, 'Sorry I spoke,' and on the other, 'Sorry they spoke.'"

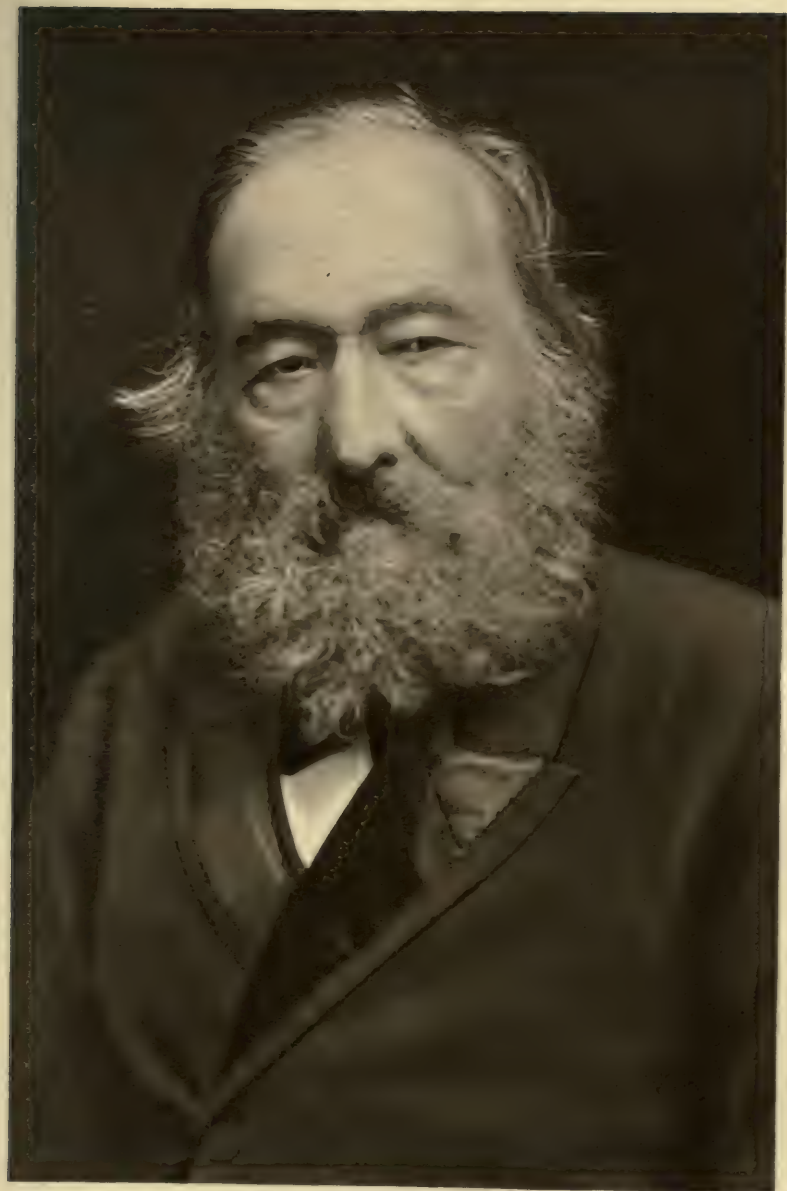
Before me as I write is a faded sheet of paper covered with tremulous, fine characters, which Alfred Louis sent me after one of our meetings, and I think poetry lovers will welcome his sonnet, "Hereafter," whose beauty never fails to make a fresh appeal whenever I read it.

HEREAFTER

Thou knowest not, thou, what must remain unknown
Through all that my poor words can say or sing,
The measure of the love to thee I bring.
One day thou wilt, when, by a graven stone,
That bears a name, thou standest, white, alone!
Shadowed by yearning Memory's raven wing,
Rained on by blossoms of some wind-torn Spring,
Wherefrom thirst-quenching fruit shall ne'er be grown.
Then, power shall rest upon the vanished hand
Once too much trembling at thy touch for power,
Then shall my soul at last thy soul command,
As it might not in time's brief fitful hour!
And what Life's fires could neither melt nor burn
Shall yield with tears to ashes and the urn.

Mr. Louis also sent me some stanzas from his other poems, and I cannot resist quoting his pathetic little "Memo for A. B." :

"A. H. L. asks particularly that the stanzas, 'Hence, then at last,' shall not be copied for anyone except Mrs. Ff., and also that they be not *discussed*



Photograph by HUSTED

ALFRED H. LOUIS
The Original of Daniel Deronda

Algernon Blackwood

with anyone. A. H. L. feels sure that Alg. B. or Mrs. Ff. will be so kind as to oblige him in this little request, for which he has reasons.

“A. H. L. feels deeply the appreciation of Mrs. Ff. As to that of A. B., he is used to it, but is never tired of it. On the contrary, it is always fresh refreshment to him, and such as Poet hath seldom had.”

I have never forgotten Alfred Louis, and his memory is one of those tender thoughts which serve to soften my heart when it hardens towards life, for it is impossible to recall his personality without feeling that he was one of those wounded souls who have suffered many things uncomplainingly, and whose patience and tenderness under affliction are somewhat in the nature of a martyrdom.

I cannot describe how much I have learned through knowing Algernon Blackwood. He related to me the wonders of Egypt, and I became steeped in mummy-lore and the magic practised by the priests in that remote age. I no longer regarded the Elements as the ordinary equipments of our globe; they became the personification of all that is grand and terrible, spiritual powers who even claimed some human beings as their children, and endowed them with their own stupendous attributes; and I listened enrapt to my friend's belief that certain houses become saturated with the personalities of those who have once inhabited them. This idea so fascinated me that I decided to see whether any traces of the personality of my mother's people lingered around their old home of Tottenham Park. Mamma was the last survivor of her family; her brothers and sister were all dead, and I have often wondered whether my saddened life is a heritage from them, since most of them died young and all were glad to die.

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It was a long drive to Tottenham, but I remembered having heard my mother describe it as being quite in the country when she was a child. I was curious to see the place, as I possessed pictures of several of the family who once resided there : my great-grandmother, a handsome, dark woman, in a velvet gown, surrounded by her pretty children ; and my maternal grandfather, who died in 1854, an appealing person in a black stock, very much like David Copperfield as depicted by Owen Nares. Mamma appeared to have been fond of her mother, the heiress daughter of a Master in Chancery ; she only survived my grandfather a year, and her five little orphan children were entrusted to the care of strangers, with more or less disastrous results.

When I arrived at Tottenham Park I could discover no traces of it, as the property was in the devastating hands of a speculative builder. The old house had been ruthlessly razed to the ground, and the stables, with their quaint leaden cupola, alone remained intact amid the scene of destruction and desolation.

I walked slowly through what had once been a roseroy and a Dutch garden, and looked across the fields which led to old Tottenham Church, where the bells had rung to celebrate the births of my mother and her sister and brothers. Then once more I realised how alone I was in the world, since so many were gone with whom I could have claimed kinship. I shivered a little when I remembered that these deserted gardens had once echoed with the laughter of happy children, and the spirits of the dead seemed to whisper : " The wind passeth over it and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more."

I told Algernon Blackwood about this expedition,

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and I queried the advisability of feeling affected by the sight of masses of fallen bricks and lopped trees. "That's not the kind of sentiment which is useful to anyone who wishes to be a worldly success," I told him. "I often wonder whether it was wise of me to attempt to get out of the groove in which Fate and the accident of birth had placed me. If I had only been 'umble, like Uriah Heep, I might have done better for myself."

I can never forget the sympathy and kindness which Algernon Blackwood has invariably extended towards me, and I watch his career with the greatest possible interest. I have always appreciated his genius, and I am convinced that his masterpiece is yet to come—at present he is merely passing through the phase necessary to its evolution. When I read the notices of his books, and learn from them the high opinion in which his work is held, both by the critics and the public, I rejoice exceedingly. But I think the general criticism of this man's books loses sight of the fact that there are three distinct aspects of his talent: he stands out as Interpreter of Children in the Wordsworthian sense; as Interpreter of Nature in the primitive, poetic-animistic sense; and as the boldest Interpreter of what I may call Super-Nature among any writers of the day in any country. Personally, I prefer the last aspect of him, but the three must be borne in mind if a true estimate of his work as a whole is to be obtained.

My friendship with Algernon Blackwood is lasting and sincere, and among my few treasured possessions I greatly prize a letter in which he wrote: "There is always a deep respect in my heart for you, as for one who is for ever bravely struggling to find her wings,

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and to escape from that limited cage in which, alas! so many of us seem content to live and die. . . . I can never forget, either, the early days when you believed in my little talent—long before I believed in it myself—and gave me the unfailing help of your sympathy and encouragement.”

CHAPTER XVI

WILLIAM LE QUEUX AND "F. R."

WHEREAS my friendship with Algernon Blackwood had the effect of transferring me to a most exalted plane—when, for the time being, I saw the troubles of daily life in that right proportion which helped me to meet them with courage, if not with positive contempt—my friendship with William Le Queux had exactly the opposite effect.

This charming cosmopolitan invariably made me feel that I longed to buy beautiful gowns, luxurious furs, and to start off hot-foot to Paris, Rome, or the Riviera. I think Le Queux's personality always suggests the most fashionable hotels, Roses d'Orsay perfume, "palmy" Winter Gardens, and the very last word in automobiles; he is a type of the polished citizen of the world to be met with in the great cities of Europe, a brilliant talker, a courtier to his fingertips, possessed of a certain inborn shrewdness, and an unerring judge of character. I never knew his summing-up of a man or a woman to be wrong, but when he spoke about their faults his kind heart always prompted him to put forward extenuating circumstances that mitigated the severity of his opinion. He possesses a marvellous memory, and as a story-teller he easily outrivals the renowned Scheherazade. He produces novels with the speed of a "quick-lunch counter," and his plots vary as much as the weather,

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which is the best way to describe his versatile talent; indeed, "Time cannot change, nor custom stale, the infinite variety" of Le Queux's fund of romance.

When I first made his acquaintance, I was disposed to believe that he was rather superficial and slightly insincere, but I soon discovered my mistake. William Le Queux is good-hearted in the best sense of the word, and he is, as well, an indefatigable helper of lame dogs; when once he counts you as his friend, nothing is too much trouble if he thinks he can be of any service to you, and in prosperity and adversity he remains unchanged.

I was greatly interested to hear about William Le Queux's friendship with the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony, as he was one of the very few people in whom she trusted. He had known her well in Florence, and he was the first person whose advice she sought when, so unwisely for herself, she decided to marry Enrico Toselli.

"How did you first hear about the marriage?" I asked. "Well," said Le Queux, "I had just returned from Norway, and I was, as usual, staying at the Cecil, when a former servant of mine, who was employed at the hotel, told me that the Princess had called several times to inquire for me, and she appeared very anxious to know when I was expected back in London. Three days later I received a letter from her, in which she asked me to call at the Norfolk Hotel, Arundel Street, where she was staying under the name of 'Madame Dubois.'

"I went at once, and H.I.H. 'Madame Dubois' informed me that she had made up her mind to marry Signor Toselli, as she believed that he would make her

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happy, and she professed herself to be most devotedly attached to him.

"I begged the Princess not to act upon the impulse of the moment, but to consider the gravity of the question of her remarriage with anyone in view of the fact that her divorce was not recognised by the Vatican, and that her best policy was to lie low, as there was every chance that the King of Saxony might later reconsider the advisability of allowing her to return to Dresden.

"But Louisa was as mulish as only a Habsburg in love can be; she waved aside all my objections and laughed at all my gloomy prognostications. 'Dear Mr. Le Queux,' she said, 'let me introduce you to Enrico; you'll see for yourself that he is the only man in the world with whom I can ever possibly be happy.'

"'Is Signor Toselli staying here?' I faltered, with an ever-increasing sense of Louisa's amazing indiscretions. 'But, naturally, he is here,' she replied; 'I will introduce him to you at once.' And, so saying, she went in search of the ideal lover; and a dreadful suspicion crossed my mind that he was known in the hotel as Monsieur Dubois.

"Enrico Toselli was quite a pleasant person, and, as no doubt he had already been warned about the vagaries of the Habsburg temperament, I did not attempt to influence him for or against the adventure. He was, besides, suffering from *tête montée*, no doubt due to the extraordinary position in which he found himself, since no pianist, however famous, had hitherto aspired to marriage with an ex-Crown Princess.

"'You must help us to get married as soon as possible,' said Louisa, in her most imperious manner. 'Go and see about it without losing a moment.'

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“I saw it was useless to argue, so I made the necessary arrangements, and the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony and Signor Toselli were married in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, at the office of the registrar, who, I think, was greatly impressed to see an Imperial Princess walk in most unconcernedly from the street to get married like ordinary people. After the ceremony I took the newly-married couple to lunch at the Savoy, most devoutly hoping that the news would not become public property for a day or two.

“However, the secret had leaked out, and after lunch we were confronted by a mob of journalists anxious to secure copy. I hustled the Princess and her husband into a cab, and we drove to the back entrance of the Cecil, where I was able to smuggle them in unobserved.

“‘Don’t stir a step,’ I ordered, and hurried down to grapple with the representatives of the Press.

“In the meantime my brother arrived on the scene, and, in blissful ignorance of the events of the morning, went up unannounced to my rooms, to which his pass-key gave him access at any time. But, to his surprise, he was confronted with the spectacle of a young man and a charming lady enjoying all the raptures of a *solitude à deux*.

“The young man at once hurled himself upon my brother, who thought that the Hotel Cecil most assuredly specialised in guests who were lunatics at large. Being a man of peace, he could not understand the provocation for this emotional onslaught, but in sheer self-defence he was at last obliged to retaliate, and eventually he and Signor Toselli disappeared through the bedroom door, and continued to pummel each other in the corridor.

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"At last honour was vindicated, the young man rushed back into my rooms, and my brother went in search of me. Amicable explanations followed, but when the time for Louisa's departure for Paris drew near she suddenly discovered that she had forgotten her travelling-cloak.

"I have never to this day found out what happened to Louisa's heavy luggage—it must have been sent on to Paris—but when I went to the Norfolk Hotel the quality of the atmosphere was positively arctic, owing to the fact having now transpired that the unconventional Princess had already anticipated her honeymoon there as Madame Dubois.

"I therefore asked my brother to go to Whiteley's and buy a travelling-cloak and a few other things for the Princess, and in the evening we all drove to Charing Cross. Toselli, my brother, and a hold-all (which contained the worldly possessions of the romantic couple) preceded the Princess and myself, and on the way to the station Louisa turned to me and said, with her irresistible cynical charm :

"'Only one thing now remains, dear Mr. Le Queux, to create the last word in a Court Scandal.'

"'And what is that, Princess?' I asked.

"'Well—to give Enrico and your brother the slip, and for *you* to run away with me.'"

William Le Queux told me that the reports of Louisa's love affairs in Florence were grossly exaggerated, and that the most wicked slanders concerning her were circulated by the instructions of the Saxon Court, backed up by a section of the easily corrupted Italian Press. In his opinion she was most unjustly blamed for indiscretions of which she was not guilty, and she disdained to protest publicly against the

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scandalous stories, which did not certainly lose anything by repetition.

Most Italians are boastful where their *amours* are concerned, and it was, therefore, quite usual to hear young men hinting mysteriously that they had received special favours from the Crown Princess, knowing full well that she would consider such stories utterly beneath her notice, even should they chance to reach her ears. There was, however, one man whose mad passion for Louisa ended by his committing suicide—this was Count Bindo Peruzzi di Medici, the last of the great family whose name he bore.

He was considered to be the best-looking man in Florence, and Le Queux told me that he possessed a most charming disposition. "It was ten thousand pities," he said, "that Louisa did not fall in love with him, as at least she might then have stood a reasonable chance of happiness. But she told Bindo that she did not care for him, and forbade him to see her again after a final interview which she agreed to grant the unhappy young man."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Bindo Peruzzi called at my villa in the Viale dei Colli just before midnight," replied William Le Queux, "and sat with me for half an hour. He was excited and restless; but he told me he was leaving Florence on the morrow, 'and,' he added, 'it will be a long time, my dear friend, before I see you again.' He left me at one o'clock, and then returned to his rooms, where he shot himself."

I was rather shocked at this tragedy of unrequited affection, but I never imagined that, later, I should hear the ghastly sequel to the suicide of Bindo Peruzzi from Louisa herself—but that is another story!

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I never tired of listening to William Le Queux, and when he discussed crime and criminals he was equally as interesting as when he talked about the numerous Royalties who at different times had honoured him with their friendship.

One of his most intimate friends is the Cavaliere Luigi Frosali, who has the reputation of being the most astute detective in Europe, and I heard an interesting story about him which proves the efficiency of the methods of the Italian police.

A Russian Princess who was staying in Rome had her diamonds stolen, but all efforts to discover the perpetrators of the theft proved unavailing. After twelve months patient search the police eliminated every possible criminal, except a man who was then undergoing a sentence of imprisonment at Trieste.

The great detective, therefore, incarcerated himself in the same prison, and, passing as a convicted thief, he managed occasionally to exchange a few words with his "quarry" when they were together in the exercise yard. The detective's knowledge of the underworld and its denizens was so thorough that his fellow-prisoner soon became confident that he was exchanging thoughts with a trusted member of the light-fingered fraternity of which he was a member.

It was during one of these conversations that Frosali casually remarked :

"I say, your name reminds me of a poor family I knew of in Rome who were almost starving when I was bagged and brought here."

"A poor family?" queried the prisoner, whose wife and children (as the detective already knew) lived in Rome.

"Yes," said Frosali, "a woman and three young

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boys. They were almost penniless, but she was a proud soul, and she would not tell anyone what had reduced her to such straits."

"It is my Marietta," cried the man, "my poor, suffering wife. Listen, friend," he continued; "you are one of us, a true comrade, so I will put you on your honour to help me. A year ago I stole the diamonds of Princess S——, and buried them in a garden out of Rome until things had quieted down and it was safe to dispose of them. But I cannot see my dear ones starve, so I will tell you where the jewels are to be found! Listen. You are leaving this place to-morrow; don't, I implore you, waste any time once you are back in Rome. Dig up the box which contains the diamonds, and take them to X." (mentioning the name of a well-known "receiver"); "he'll buy them. Give the money to my wife, and retain a certain sum for your trouble. I know, comrade," he continued, "that, by the rules of our Society, you will not play me false."

The detective, of course, promised to carry out his instructions to the letter. The diamonds were actually discovered in the place where they had been so securely hidden, and they were eventually restored to the owner, who had by this time given up all hopes of ever seeing them again.

A jewel adventure in which William Le Queux was actively concerned happened when the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony asked him to deposit her famous pearl necklace in French, Lemon & Co.'s Bank at Florence. The necklace consisted of three hundred and seventy large, perfectly matched pearls, which had originally formed part of the Dresden Court jewels, and had been secretly brought to London by Louisa. She

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now decided to remove them from the care of Mr. Massey, of the London and Westminster Bank at Temple Bar, and send them to Florence, as she contemplated remaining in Italy for a considerable time.

William Le Queux agreed to convey the precious necklace to Florence, and it was securely stowed away in a belt which he wore under his clothes. He was very friendly with Mr. Haines, of the Dover Customs, who met him on his arrival and crossed over to Calais with him. Just before they reached Calais, Mr. Haines asked William Le Queux whether he was acquainted with a tall, well-dressed man who had been looking at them on the boat with some degree of interest. Le Queux answered in the negative, and the journey to Paris passed off without any untoward incident.

At Paris Le Queux dined, drove to the Gare de Lyons, and afterwards left for Florence by the 10.45 p.m. Rome Express. But he was most disagreeably surprised to discover that the other berth in his sleeping-compartment was occupied by the man to whom Haines had directed his attention on the boat! His suspicions were instantly aroused, and, under the pretext of having his ticket examined, he went into the corridor and spoke to the conductor of the *wagons-lits*, with whom, as a constant traveller to and from Florence, he was well acquainted. William Le Queux remained with the conductor until the train reached Aix. The strange individual who shared his compartment then got out, and was presently joined by two other men who had evidently travelled in a different part of the train. There was not the slightest doubt that Le Queux's mission was known, and that he had been watched from London; and, doubtless, his presence of mind had alone prevented the theft of

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Louisa's necklace, which had been arranged to take place in the express.

When the train arrived at Bardonnechia, William Le Queux told the whole story to the Commissario of Police, and, to his intense relief (as the three hundred and seventy pearls by this time represented three hundred and seventy millstones round his middle), a special detective was ordered to accompany him to Florence, where he eventually deposited the necklace safely in French, Lemon & Co.'s Bank.

I certainly possess many pleasant recollections of William Le Queux, and I was always delighted to see him whenever he could find a moment to call. I was reading innumerable manuscripts about this time, and I discovered another sensation in René Bazin's "*L'Isolée*," which was afterwards translated into English under the title of "*The Nun*." The book caught on, and we sold thousands of copies, but the story was so tragic and so human that directly I read it I was certain that it would make a wide appeal, and I was right, although the beautiful picture of the nun on the cover no doubt considerably helped the sales.

This was a very happy period, as I met so many clever people, although I only found one real friend in a woman—Ada Leverson, whose books possess a delicate elusive charm and a bitter-sweet appreciation of life, which gives her work something of the beauty of a delicate cameo. Ada Leverson dissects the souls of so-called "smart" people with almost cruel accuracy; she knows all their weaknesses, all their petty contrivings, nothing escapes her polished epigram and delicate satire, while she never descends to vulgarity. Her books are essentially typical of the writer—suave,

William Le Queux and "F. R."

charming and refined, and the half-veiled, playful maliciousness, which at times gives a touch of piquancy to her pages, is so good-natured that it is easily forgiven.

Ada Leverson is the friend who is mentioned with so much gratitude by Oscar Wilde in the introduction to "De Profundis," and she and her husband courageously afforded him their hospitality during the dreadful days of his trial. She once told me how transformed and spiritualised Wilde looked when he first met the few of his remaining friends after his release from prison. "He made most of the other men look like convicts," said Ada Leverson. Her wit is delightful, and I remember her remark about Viola Tree's marriage, when she observed that "The Gaiety girls marry into the Peerage, but the Tree girls marry into the Parsonage."

Frank Richardson is another of the friends whose acquaintance I first made through the introduction of Eveleigh Nash. He has always been kindly disposed to me, and I think that few writers excel his subtle criticism or genial raillery at life. It is impossible to take offence at anything that he writes or says, simply because Frank Richardson's sense of humour is, like himself, *impayable*.

But through all the insouciance of his writing runs a vein of gold which prevents his work from ever becoming commonplace, and "The Other Man's Wife," which I consider to be his best book, abounds in subtle touches worthy of Thackeray, which has made me wish that Frank Richardson would write a novel on the lines of "Vanity Fair." As a caricaturist he equals "Max," and I always remember his really lovely caricature of Mrs. Brown Potter which fascinated

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me so much when I first admired it at Albemarle Street.

He is a wonderful raconteur, and his rapier-like thrusts of repartee cannot easily be parried. I have never forgotten his apt rejoinder to Sir Herbert Tree when he asked Frank Richardson what he thought of the first-night production of *The Merchant of Venice*, when it so chanced that many wealthy Hebrews were present in the theatre.

“Wonderful, wonderful,” replied the humorist. “Why, my dear Tree, you’ve not only got the Ghetto on the stage, but in the stalls as well.”

His delightful audacity is so audacious that it disarms criticism, and I remember an instance of this one day when I was lunching with him at the Carlton. The next table to ours was occupied by two very self-conscious girls, whose style of good looks suggested a perpetual pose for a pictorial post card, and whose voices were those of ladies whose *spécialité* is to look lovely in musical comedy, and to introduce a song and dance with a few inappropriate words.

I suppose we did not sufficiently appreciate who they were, or else they knew Frank Richardson, who had tactlessly forgotten their existence, but they jingled their gold-meshed bags and endeavoured strenuously to make their presence felt.

This perpetual striving for effect had a depressing and irritating effect upon my host, who, after gazing at the ladies with marked interest, summoned the head waiter to his side.

“Pray tell me,” he said, in a tired voice whose languid intonations reached the pretty creatures at the next table, “pray tell me, who *are* these footlight favourites?”

William Le Queux and "F. R."

At one time "F. R." seriously considered the question of cremation for himself after death, and he sent to various offices for full particulars and a scale of charges for reducing the human body to ashes. But he fell foul of Golder's Green through an injudicious question which he proposed to the authorities. "Will you kindly inform me," he wrote, "whether you would suggest my body being taken to Golder's Green in a four-wheeler, and if it should be placed outside as a parcel or go inside as a passenger?"

After such a question it is not surprising that the subject dropped. I owe many a hearty laugh to Frank Richardson, who nicknamed me "Grouse," and always alludes to me by this sobriquet.

When I decided to collect my scattered memories of life I naturally wished to mention "F. R." as having been one of the friends who have done much towards making my recollections pleasant. I accordingly sought him at Albemarle Street, and, after we had spoken about my book, I asked him to give me some unpublished material concerning his literary career.

"You were going to write a play at one period," I said; "did the idea ever materialise?"

"Right—Grouse. I was once actively engaged in collaboration with George Grossmith," he replied, "but the play has never been produced or even written. Of course, you know that the writing of a play is only half the battle—in fact, it is the least important part. Getting it produced is the vital thing."

"Tell me some gossip about yourself. The ways of authors always interest the public."

"You might say that, although I am a writer of

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books, I am not a pedestrian," said "F. R." gravely. "But I often walk all the way from my flat in Albemarle Street, across Piccadilly, to the Devonshire Club. George Grossmith once asked me, when we were outside the Gaiety Theatre, if I ever walked. 'Oh yes,' I told him. 'Let's walk to a cab.' And I did." Grossmith used this tag later at the Gaiety with great success.

"Do be serious," I begged, "and tell me something about the Garrick Club and its members; that's a really interesting place—'some' club, I should imagine."

"Well, I remember that a few years ago many of the more eminent members of the Garrick Club received, to their surprise, a rather striking tie of salmon-pink and apple-green. At last it came to my turn. The gifts were anonymous, and bore the name of an Oxford Street hosier. Eventually it turned out that Norman Forbes (Forbes Robertson's more distinguished brother) had bought up the stock of a defunct Suffragette society's colours, and every now and then wrote to the shopkeeper telling him to forward one of these terrible things to this or that member of the club.

"I happened to be wearing mine when watching a tennis tournament at Folkestone. Next to me was seated a confirmed vulgar man in the famous yellow, red and black Zingari colours. Very rudely he asked :

"'What are those colours you've got on?'

"'I Zingari,' said I.

"'No, they're not. *I'm* wearing Zingari colours.'

"'Yes, *I* know,' I remarked; 'but I didn't know that *you* knew.'"

CHAPTER XVII

THE COUNTESS OF CARDIGAN

THE idea of the Countess of Cardigan's "Recollections" first originated in the early summer of 1908, when William Le Queux was dining with me one evening at Park Street.

"I want to have a talk about something really interesting, Mrs. Ffoulkes," said he. "Have you ever heard people mention the celebrated Countess of Cardigan, the widow of the Balaclava hero?"

I nodded, and Le Queux continued: "I knew her well when I was living in Northamptonshire, and I can assure you that she is the most wonderful woman of her generation, a sort of throw-back to Cleopatra and Helen of Troy, combined with a dash of Nell Gwynne and Madame Du Barry. She set Society by the ears in the 'fifties, and defied it, with little or no regard for the consequences; her creed has always been to do exactly as she thinks fit, and as a young woman few people cared to offend her. Her tongue is sharp, her memory miraculous, her intellect unclouded, and she is altogether a really remarkable individual."

"All very interesting," I replied, "but what is at the back of your mind—something, I'm sure?"

"Yes; there is something in connection with Lady Cardigan which may appeal to you, and I believe you are the only woman in London who is capable of carrying it out. Listen. I've told the old Countess

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that she ought to have a book written about her life and the people she has known, and she appears to like the idea ; in fact, she has asked me to find someone who would be willing to help her."

"But what makes you think that *I* am the right person? I've never done any work of that kind ; it's a big undertaking."

"I'm perfectly certain that you *are* the right person," said my friend emphatically. "You are emotional and a bit of a rebel, you're absolutely broad-minded, and you're sympathetic—all these would appeal to Lady Cardigan. In fact," he added, "I've already mentioned your name, and she is most anxious to meet you. Come and see her one afternoon, and talk the matter over. . . . I feel convinced that you and she will get on very well together."

"Agreed," said I, for William Le Queux's description of Lady Cardigan had already fired my imagination. "If Lady Cardigan likes me, I don't see any reason why I should not write the book, and no doubt Eveleigh Nash will publish it."

A week later I went with Mr. Le Queux to 7 Deanery Street, Park Lane, the town house of the unconventional countess, whose doings had caused such a flutter in Victorian dovecotes ; and the dignified butler, who was a familiar figure in the Cardigan *ménage*, preceded us up the rather awkward stairs to the drawing-room, and there announced us as "Mr. William Le Queux and Mrs. Ffoulkes, my lady."

The room in which I found myself was large and light, and it gave me the impression of the boudoir of a French marquise which had been slightly soiled by the smoke and dirt of London ; but no doubt when the decorations were in their pristine freshness it had

The Countess of Cardigan

been a charming scheme in white and gold, and the ceiling was prettily painted to represent an expanse of blue sky lightly flecked with delicious little clouds.

A lady was sitting in an elaborately carved, high-backed chair, and Le Queux introduced me, saying as he did so : " This is Mrs. Ffoulkes, who is going to write your book."

I shall never forget my first impressions of the Countess of Cardigan. I saw a slender woman with the figure of a girl, and the most amazingly painted face crowned by a wig of abundant golden curls. The lips were very scarlet, the cheeks were very pink, the eyebrows most delicately pencilled, and the whole effect was that of a mask. But suddenly my attention was riveted by two bright, beautiful eyes, the only trace of nature left amidst the prodigious confusion of powder and paint.

The penetrating eyes were wonderful, full of infinite knowledge and mocking cynicism ; indeed, they seemed like two vigilant sentinels who defied the coming of Age and Death ; their expression was hard, and the hard brightness reminded me somewhat of the cold glitter of ice. Lady Cardigan's mouth was rather large and expressive, and her nose was small and well formed ; but it was really difficult to imagine what she had been like in the days of her youth, because the whole effect of her appearance was now entirely artificial, and her dead yellow hair was exactly like that always associated with wax dolls.

Lady Cardigan wore a white brocade gown, with many rows of pearls round her neck, and a pink rose was put coquettishly in the curls over her right ear ; she had lovely, slender feet encased in gossamer silk stockings, and her high-heeled shoes were certainly not

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the sort of footgear usually associated with an old lady of eighty-four.

She seemed genuinely pleased to see William Le Queux, and I was greatly attracted by the well-bred intonations of her voice; I have rarely listened to anyone with such real pleasure, and it is a pity that some of the smart people who shriek instead of speaking could not have taken lessons in elocution from the Countess of Cardigan.

We discussed the book, and she seemed all impatience to begin work. "I always wanted to tell some stories about Society," she said; "I've known so many interesting people, and I haven't forgotten how unkindly I was treated, simply because poor Cardigan fell in love with me when his troublesome wife was alive. It's a habit with men to tire of their wives nowadays, but when I was a young woman it was looked upon as a crime."

"Well, you must tell Mrs. Ffoulkes all about it," said William Le Queux. "I've insisted that she must write a wonderful book for you, and imagine how surprised everyone will be when it is published!"

Lady Cardigan laughed maliciously. "Yes," she replied with decision, "I should *like* to surprise some of the silly women who worried me so much. Now there's Louise, Duchess of Devonshire, I always hated her, and she has always hated me. I remember how jealous she was when the King spoke to me . . . and . . ."

"Dear Lady Cardigan," interposed Le Queux hastily, "won't you sing one of your charming little French love-songs?" The old lady instantly forgot the Duchess of Devonshire, and went over to the grand piano, which stood at the end of the long

The Countess of Cardigan

room, seated herself in front of it, and sang "La Perichole."

I listened spell-bound. I could never have believed it possible that anyone of eighty-four could have sung without affording food for mirth, but this extraordinary woman fascinated me by the sheer unreality of her whole personality. Her voice must once have been lovely, and even now its sweetness was akin to the delicate sound of some old harpsichord. Lady Cardigan did not content herself with merely singing, for she suddenly became an actress, and I forgot the crude paint and the yellow wig as I watched her expressive face. As she sang the quaint words of the song she inclined her head a little to one side, and I caught an expression of girlish coquetry in the young eyes set in that old, old face; she smiled, and one forgot the scarlet mouth, because the smile was so alluring and womanly.

I was quite carried away by the prospect of knowing this interesting individual, and I determined to do my very best with the book. It was arranged that I should go to Deanery Street for an hour every afternoon, when I could talk to Lady Cardigan and make notes of any material which I thought would be useful.

"I wonder if I'll succeed in depicting Lady Cardigan as she really is," I said to William Le Queux, when we had left Deanery Street. "She is wonderful, but far too clever and outspoken to be popular with her own sex; no wonder they feared and disliked her. What a firebrand she must have been!"

In this way "My Recollections" came to be written; the idea originated with William Le Queux alone, although Eveleigh Nash encouraged me to write the book, as he thought it would be a good seller. I have

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always been amused at the calm way in which certain people have claimed the authorship, but the truth of the story is that Lady Cardigan supplied the material, I wrote the book, and Eveleigh Nash published "*My Recollections*," concerning which the *Daily Telegraph* wrote :

"Never was there such a book. It was an anarchic outburst of irreverence, of scandal; it held nothing sacred, it respected nobody; and its outlook on life was as cynical, although without any savagery, rather artlessly indulgent and genial, and its language was as unveiled as Balzac's '*Contes Drôlatiques*.'"

I rapidly became friendly with Lady Cardigan, and strange though it may seem, I began to feel an odd kind of protective tenderness towards her. But if I had told her this, I am sure that her indomitable spirit would have scorned the idea. She required no pity, and she treated the Society which had condemned her in her glorious womanhood with lofty disdain. But although the pain of the wound had become deadened with the passage of years, Lady Cardigan never made any pretence of cherishing the Christian virtue of forgiveness in her cynical old age, and I, too, gradually began to hate the hypocrites who had constituted themselves her judges. No doubt this was due to the strange faculty that Mr. Le Queux had rightly surmised I possessed—a faculty which enables me temporarily to saturate myself in the individuality of the person whose book I am writing, and to appreciate the conditions of their lives with such uncanny understanding that I almost become their mental doubles until my work is completed.

I do not understand my curious gift for "writing portraits." In ordinary life I am a very ordinary and

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painfully nervous person, who cannot walk into a restaurant without feeling that she possesses as many feet as a centipede, and that everybody is looking at them. I completely lose my power of speech at a dinner-party, and I am so conscious of my imperfections that the knowledge has often made me shrink from meeting the various charming people who have sometimes wished to make my acquaintance.

But when I am writing a book of Recollections everything is changed, and it is a case of *autres temps autres mœurs*. With the exception of Lord Rossmore, I have always been entirely in sympathy with my "sitters," and although "Darry" disliked me, and I disliked "Darry," I nevertheless absorbed enough of his personality to make a success of "Things I Can Tell."

"My Recollections" was compiled in a very peculiar manner, as Lady Cardigan had never kept a diary, and, with the exception of the letters of the Count of Montemolins, she possessed no material which Major Hume would have described as "documentary evidence." Her memory was marvellous, and I am sure that all the statements which she made were quite true—although she has been accused of disseminating deliberate and malicious falsehoods, but to the best of my belief founded on my intimate knowledge of her character, the Countess of Cardigan spoke and wrote nothing but the unwelcome and the unvarnished truth.

Lady Cardigan was an individual who did not possess the inventive imagination of a successful romancer: she was a brilliant talker, a wonderfully well-read woman, but her attainments stopped dead short of lying. Countess Marie Larisch, like Lady Cardigan, is another person who has been unjustly credited with

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specialising in falsehoods, but both she and Lady Cardigan made statements about people and things simply because they knew them to be true, and certainly not because they wished to impose upon the credulity of their readers.

We worked for an hour every afternoon at Deanery Street, and when Lady Cardigan felt that I was thoroughly in sympathy with her, she talked of her loves and hates in the most candid manner. Her outlook on life was absolutely that of the great courtesans who have made and unmade the history of nations: men, in her opinion, were expressly created for the purpose of being slaves to women, and the woman who did not make material use of them was, in the opinion of Lady Cardigan, nothing better than a fool.

She had loved the good things of the world as a young woman, and she still clung to them in her old age: beautiful dresses and jewels had always been necessities to her, and she regarded wealth and position merely as the usual attributes of the life to which she had always been accustomed. Her contempt for the *nouveau riche* was boundless, and she never ceased to lament the bygone splendours of Rotten Row, when "women looked like ladies on horseback, and took some sort of pride in their appearance—not as now, dear Mrs. Ffoulkes, when they ride in straw hats and covert coats."

I found it at first very difficult to obtain any consecutive information from Lady Cardigan, but I conceived the bright idea of making a list of the names of people she had known, and then proceeding somewhat on the lines of "tell me a story." One topic of conversation was certain to recall something else to her mind, and I used to jot down her anecdotes and say-



Adeline Louise Maria de Rossey
Comtesse de Carignan
v. A. L. Rossey.

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ings in the manner of a jig-saw puzzle, which I afterwards pieced into an intelligible narrative.

We rambled from one thing to another, skipping a decade or two, and then returning unexpectedly to the original starting point; but I soon learnt wisdom by experience, and never interrupted Lady Cardigan. I just let her talk, and when she had finished I began! She loved to discuss chiffons, and occasionally when she was describing a gown which she had worn in the long ago, she would suddenly remember something which she had admired a day or two previously in the Park. "So, pink always became you?" I would ask. "Yes," she answered, "I wore a lovely pink-and-white brocade at a Court ball in 1842, when I was dressed as a Louis XV. shepherdess; and do you know, dear Mrs. Ffoulkes, I saw such a pretty pink picture-hat yesterday; I don't know the woman who wore it, but the hat was really beautiful," and she would continue to discuss hats until I reminded her that a few moments before we had been talking about a Court ball in 1842. This often happened, and I gradually became accustomed to it, but at first it was somewhat disconcerting to lose the thread of the narrative in this unexpected way.

I occasionally ventured to protest when Lady Cardigan discussed the doings of her contemporaries with almost brutal candour. "We really can't put the story of Lady N——'s black baby in the book," I told her; "surely it is not necessary to tell the public that a very Exalted Personage had the reputation of being a particularly uninteresting lover, and whatever is the use of saying that a certain duchess always cheated at cards?"

"I shall say what I like," she answered. "It is the truth, and it's *my* book."

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"Yes, but *I'm* writing it," I said ruefully. That was the only occasion upon which we nearly quarrelled. Lady Cardigan waived the question of the black baby, and the unsatisfactory Royal lover, but she jibbed at the omission of the indiscretions of the duchess. However that also passed, and she ordered me to record her opinion that it was exceedingly tactless of a certain much-beparagraphed lady not to have chosen a lover somewhat after the type of her husband.

"Why on earth should she have done so?" I asked, startled at the cynicism of the remark.

"Because her children would have matched better," said the terrible old lady. "Why not avoid these tell-tale and violent contrasts?"

"But I can't say that this is your *real* opinion?" I remonstrated.

"Am I Countess of Cardigan, or am I not?" she demanded. "I shall have my book written as I think best."

I laid down my pencil, and looked straight in her angry eyes. "Listen," I said very firmly, for I knew that I must now or never define my own position. "I don't care if you are Countess of Cardigan, or just plain Mrs. Jones—you've certainly a right to say what you like, although I can't share your ultra cynical point of view. Do occasionally consider the feelings of others—you're so kind at heart."

She softened instantly, and extended her hand with a rather regal gesture. "I'm not really cross," she said; "but why should I consider anyone? Years ago, Mrs. Ffoulkes, when I was young, the most wicked things were said about me simply because Cardigan and I loved each other, and were not ashamed of our affection.

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“There was hardly a woman in my world who would not have gladly become his mistress—and I suppose I spoilt the prospects of a great many of my own sex. Society in Early Victorian days was not the perpetual Sunday-school which people are led to believe; and it is foolish to imagine that some of the upper classes who had revelled in the Regency suddenly became earthly saints, simply because Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort set them an example of domesticity. It takes an eternity to reform a roué, and you must remember that certain gay young men about town in 1825 were still in their prime in 1850. . . . My dear, there’s a great deal of nonsense talked about virtue at Court and in Society, but, believe me, there’s usually a King’s favourite in every reign.”

“I believe,” said I, greatly daring, “that you would like to have lived during the Restoration; I’m perfectly certain that Charles II. would have loved you better than all the rest of ‘the Beauties’ put together.”

Lady Cardigan was not offended.

“I am sure that I should have got on remarkably well with Charles II.,” she said drily.

Lady Cardigan had one curious trait with which I was quite out of sympathy: she never cared to have natural flowers in her house. I used to hate the great bunches of artificial roses, lilies and variegated leaves which filled the vases in her drawing-room. She had an almost childish love of pretty things, and when I knew her better I used occasionally to take her a posy of French flowers for her corsage, or the latest conceit in hat-pins for her wonderful headgear, and once I gave her a much-befrilled silk petticoat, with which she was greatly delighted. It became at last a sort of ritual for me always to produce a small parcel which contained

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some frivolous trifle whenever I went to Deanery Street, and it was a real pleasure to know how much Lady Cardigan appreciated my odd little gifts.

I loved to listen to her illuminating opinions which stripped duchesses of their dignity, and reduced many well-known peeresses to the level of adventur-esses. I had never liked what I had seen of so-called "smart" women, and I liked them still less after hearing Lady Cardigan's accounts of their intrigues and frivolities which were so essentially vulgar, so distressingly commonplace. She believed that it was the duty of the old aristocracy to brighten the life of the populace by a display of pomp and circumstance; she therefore greatly approved of Lord Lonsdale's canary-coloured carriages, and the semi-state which he keeps at Lowther Castle. Lady Cardigan had an amused contempt for the "slumming" members of the aristocracy. "What on earth do they know about how the poor live, and how much do they really care?" she demanded. "It would be far more philanthropic if they paid useful dogs to bark for them, instead of yapping themselves."

I asked her what she thought of marriage between the stage and the peerage. "I'm not surprised that young men lose their heads," said she; "actresses go on the stage with the idea of making an appeal either to the intellect or to the senses, and the latter usually predominates in the audience. Some of the girls are very charming, I'll admit, and infinitely superior to the men they marry. I remember once meeting an actress who had captured a battered young peer, whose constitution was permanently enfeebled by his strenuous attempts to crowd thirty lives into an existence of barely thirty years.

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“I thought the actress-wife a most courageous woman, but a supercilious relation of her husband’s chose to be as rude as only a woman can be. ‘Don’t you feel a little strange amongst so many of B.’s friends?’ she said. ‘I mean, wouldn’t you be more in your element moving in theatrical circles? You must find it very difficult at times to live up to B.’

“The newly-wedded peeress stared at her relation, and then gave way to unrestrained mirth. ‘*Difficult* to live up to B.’ she gasped. ‘Oh dear oh dear’

“‘I’m not aware that I have said anything in the nature of a joke,’ remarked the other lady.

“‘But it *is* a joke . . .’ replied the actress. ‘*Difficult* to live *up* to B., indeed; why, I find the greatest difficulty in living *down* to him.’”

Lady Cardigan was excessively superstitious, and she was greatly interested in someone I knew, who possessed, and still possesses, the real power of “seeing clearly,” and who reads the cards as easily as other people read books.

“Coxey” was formerly a dresser at Drury Lane Theatre, and she is one of the most quaint and amusing people that I have ever met. Her sayings are priceless, and she possesses the true Cockney sense of humour, mixed with a really alarming throw-back to the Dark Ages, when I am sure that she must have been an excessively powerful witch.

All my friends know “Coxey,” and believe in her uncanny gifts; and Lady Cardigan was always asking me to have the cards cut “behind her.” One day when I said, “Now, give Lady Cardigan a cut,” Coxey divided and examined the cards, but her face fell. “What’s wrong?” I asked.

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“Look here,” said the soothsayer bluntly, “there’s illness round your friend, but it don’t touch ’er; it concerns another woman in the same house. This person don’t seem ill *now*, but she *is*—mortal ill, and no mistake. She will go away sudden, and she will never come back again. ’Er number’s up!”

I told this somewhat alarming news to Lady Cardigan, and a few days later Coxey’s words came true. Martin, Lady Cardigan’s maid, was taken ill with internal trouble which nobody had suspected, and she was removed to St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, and there operated upon. But poor Martin never returned to Lady Cardigan’s service, for although she recovered sufficiently to leave the hospital, she died at her own home not long afterwards.

This strange coincidence resulted in Lady Cardigan often consulting Coxey through me, and in many of her letters she inquires about the “card woman.” We have had various experiences with her, and I shall never forget one man who asked her to cut his cards, as he was very anxious to know whether the course of his love would run smoothly. “Does she love me?” he asked, and he repeated the question so often that Coxey at length became annoyed. She threw down the cards. “Does she love yer? Well . . . if you will ’ave it—and, mind, it’s the cards, not *me*—*no*, *she don’t*; it’s yer oof she’s after. She’s no class, I *don’t* think.”

Coxey possesses no respect for persons, and when the Crown Princess of Saxony asked her opinion concerning the Grand Ducal family at Salzburg, she said, without any hesitation: “Oh, your Imperial Highness, ain’t yer Ma a horrid old girl, and there’s an elderly gentleman related to you—’e’s a fair terror, ’e is”—

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the "fair terror" being none other, I take it, than Francis Joseph, Emperor of Austria.

But the most curious trait in Coxey's character is a fitful remembrance of strange magic which sometimes reasserts itself in her prosaic mind, which is usually occupied with the rise in coal, and the daylight robbery of war-time prices. A sudden rush of memory sweeps over her occasionally like a flood, her face becomes transfigured, and she indeed "sees clearly."

One day, not long ago, she came to my flat, and with much solemnity produced a fearsome wax image, which she placed upon the table. "'Ere 'e is," she announced cheerfully (mentioning the name of a person who greatly disliked me); "I made 'im out of a tallow candle melted down in the oven. I always wished to see 'im on the topmost bough, but I'll watch 'e don't get there. Now, my girl, 'ere goes." She then plunged an enormous pin in the slightly vague region of the figure's heart, and I was really shocked at her mediæval display of hatred. "*Oh don't,*" I cried.

"Well, 'e's made you sup sorrow; he's one of the Kaiser's ribs, and no mistake," she retaliated fiercely. "Not but what I don't believe my curse comes home to *me*. Look at my eyes . . . all gone wrong; and now the only comforting tooth in my 'ead has broke clean off."

Poor Coxey! She has afforded me many a cheerful hour, and I shall always remember what she told me represented her greatest wish in life. "Look 'ere, Maude," she said, "(I can call you 'Maude,' can't I, in memory of the theatre, when we're alone? But of course *Madam* or *Mrs. Ffoulkes* in front of the maids)—do you know what I would like?"

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“What’s that, Coxey?” I inquired.

“Well, my dear—it’s this: I’d dearly love to cut the cards for a real outrageous magician, one of them clairvoyants. I bet old Coxey’d tell him a thing or two about himself.”

I fear that I have been as wandering as the notes for “My Recollections” in digressing from Lady Cardigan to Coxey, but writing about the superstitions of the great lady has reminded me of her kindly interest in my rather uncanny friend.

I finished my preliminary work before Lady Cardigan left London for Cowes, where she was a familiar figure for so many years. In September I went to stay the week-end at Deene Park, Lady Cardigan’s place in Northamptonshire, and I shall never forget my first impressions of Deene; small wonder that Lady Cardigan was proud of it, for I have never seen such a beautiful old house. It was full of romance, and I slept in the bedroom where Henry VII. was supposed to have rested on his way to Bosworth Field. One felt hopelessly out of keeping with the house; nothing modern should, by rights, have intruded itself, but yet the rooms occupied by its *châtelaine* were redolent of nothing but modernity.

I have a confused impression of much muslin and lace, and many coquettish blue bows in her bedroom; it was typically French, and the bed was partly made of looking-glass, an odd fancy, I suppose, peculiar to Lady Cardigan. There was a coronet at the head, or immediately over the bed—I forget which—but I know it struck me as being rather vulgar, and I think, to the best of my remembrance, that it was coloured to simulate crimson velvet and ermine.

I was much interested in the relics of the Crimea

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which were preserved under glass cases in the White Hall at Deene. They consisted of numerous swords and uniforms worn by Lord Cardigan, and the head of "Ronald," the horse he rode when he led the charge of the Light Brigade. I thought that the portraits of Lord Cardigan were rather too resplendent, as they made him appear more of a *poseur* than a soldier on active service. But I suppose the art of that period had a tendency to over-exaggeration; besides, it is well known that the Earl possessed the reputation of being somewhat of a *beau sabreur*, and, as he was a popular hero, I suppose he always liked to be in the limelight as much as possible.

The room which he once occupied at Deene was very simply furnished, and showed no evidences of the love of luxury and ostentation with which he has been credited. I was especially struck by his quaint bathroom, which possessed a marble bath sunk in the floor; but it was necessary to descend three deep steps to the surface of the water, and altogether it was a very gloomy-looking pit-like hole. A primitive shower-bath was suspended in mid-air by a long chain, and I trembled to think what the result might have been if the chain had chanced to break, and precipitate the weighty tank on the occupant of the bath below.

The state apartments were beautiful, and the Tapestry Room—always reserved for Royal guests—was occupied by the two sons of the Infanta Eulalia when they stayed at Deene for the shooting in 1907. The room is supposed to be haunted, and I do not know whether Don Alphonso and his brother actually saw the ghost, but the household was startled in the small hours by the violent ringing of bells in the Royal bedroom, and both Bourbon Princes were discovered in

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a state of painful nervous agitation—something had most thoroughly frightened them. But a great deal of good-humoured practical joking was usually indulged in at Deene, and this perhaps might easily have accounted for the scare in the Tapestry Room.

Lady Cardigan's rooms faced a long terrace, and a beautiful magnolia covered part of the wall under whose shelter she often liked to sit in the sun when her rheumatism prevented her from taking exercise—a sad deprivation for one who had been the personification of activity, and who had formerly excelled in all kinds of outdoor sports.

She was very much pleased by my admiration of her home, and she especially enjoined me to look at a curious building which stood in the garden. "For what purpose was it used?" I asked, when I returned after having inspected the odd place. "My dear, that pavilion was especially built by Cardigan as a safe retreat where he could flirt with some of the ladies who used to come to Deene," she replied. "He had windows made in each storey in order that he and his companion could see from all sides whether any unwanted husband was meditating an intrusion on their privacy."

I thought this was rather amusing, and I reflected that if few men are heroes to their valets, still less are they heroes to their wives, for Lady Cardigan seemed to possess no illusions about her famous husband. She described his love affairs with infinite enjoyment, and I remember that one day when we were discussing Lord Cardigan, I suggested that any intimate details of his life would no doubt prove of interest in her book. "For instance," said I, "had Lord Cardigan any particular hobby?"

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"Yes—one," replied Lady Cardigan, without the slightest hesitation. "*Women* were Cardigan's hobby until he met me, and then it became *Woman* instead."

I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to Deene, but I did not commence to write "*My Recollections*" until the early spring of 1909. My stepfather died in the December of 1908, leaving a sad record of duplicity in the shape of innumerable love-letters; his many liaisons had even extended over the years of his marriage. There was no doubt now where our money had gone, and the reason for keeping Mamma "at heel" was at last explained.

She was furious when, after my stepfather's funeral, she unlocked the Blue Beard's chamber of his wardrobe and discovered the evidence of his love affairs. I was really grieved to know that she was so unhappy, but I am sure that her vanity suffered more than her affection, as her process of disillusionment had been steadily going on for years.

Why on earth will women write incriminating letters? And why will men persist in keeping them? So much may happen in these strenuous times; we are here to-day and gone to-morrow, and we can explain nothing away when once we are dead. But, as the mainspring of life is vanity, I suppose that, regardless of consequences, love-letters will be written and unwisely treasured until the end of time.

In January, 1909, I made the acquaintance of Charles Edward Jerningham, so well known as "Marmaduke" to the readers of *Truth*, and I afterwards went to see him at his "museum," since to describe 13 Pelham Crescent as a "house" is absolutely out of the question.

I found him most charming, and, like William Le

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Queux, "Marmaduke" is another good-natured helper of lame dogs. I have never heard him say an unkind word, and his absolute enjoyment of life reminds me somewhat of Lady Cardigan's; nothing seems able to ruffle the serene equanimity of his temperament.

Shortly after my visit to Pelham Crescent I had a bad attack of influenza, and directly Mr. Jerningham heard I was ill he sent me some curious paper-bound books, with the message that he felt sure they would "amuse" me. These little books were the first edition of "The Memoirs of Harriette Wilson," whose life and doings afforded so much food for gossip between the years 1810 and 1825, and the publication of whose Memoirs caused such a sensation in London Society.

Mr. Jerningham was right. "The Memoirs of Harriette Wilson" *did* amuse me, and, what is more, the style appealed to me so much that I decided to model "My Recollections" somewhat on the same lines, as the courtesan and the Countess were both fearless souls who had the absolute courage of their convictions. When I read Harriette's comments on Society I was struck by many points of resemblance between her and Lady Cardigan, and I eventually decided that the only possible way to make "My Recollections" really convincing would be to follow Harriette's example and treat everything and everybody with disarming candour.

CHAPTER XVIII

EXCELSIOR !

IN September, 1909, Eveleigh Nash published "My Recollections." I was spending my holiday at Keswick, and I shall never forget my astonishment when I first saw the headlines in the Sunday papers and read the sensational accounts of the book. It was the topic of the hour, and it burst upon Society somewhat in the manner of a cyclone, as nobody ever imagined that Lady Cardigan would wipe off old scores in this alarming manner and throw open secret cupboards where family skeletons had remained undisturbed for many years.

There was no happy medium in the opinions of the critics and the public concerning "My Recollections," which was either praised to the skies or else damned beyond redemption. But everybody talked about it, and the outspoken audacity of its revelations took away the breath of friends and enemies alike. The younger generation were now able, unrebuked, to point the finger of scorn at their elders, as Lady Cardigan's disclosures swept away the haloes which had adorned many revered heads, and distant Suburbia shuddered in horror when it first realised the often unrestrained immorality of the truly Great.

The book, however, sold like the proverbial hot cakes, and fourteen editions of it were issued between September, 1909, and May, 1911. I remember Arthur

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Humphreys telling me that Hatchard's started by ordering thirteen copies, but they eventually sold hundreds. It was a golden harvest to the booksellers, and, as it represented the first sensational success connected with Eveleigh Nash's tenancy of Fawside House, I felt very happy to think that it was in a great measure due to me and my work.

In some quarters the outcry against Lady Cardigan was great, but this troubled her not at all. When it was pointed out that her remarks about Maria, Marchioness of Ailesbury, had excited a good deal of indignation, she merely shrugged her shoulders and replied: "*I see nothing wrong in what I've written—everyone knows Lady A—; they may pretend they don't, but they do.*"

Among a host of others, the Dudleys in particular considered themselves aggrieved. Lady Cardigan had related the story of Lord Ward and his erring wife simply because she believed that it was common property at the time of Lady Ward's death. "It's a lot of nonsense, my dear," she said very angrily. "When people do these things, they ought not to mind footing the bill. *I* never did. Thank God, *I* was never a coward."

"But people say that you've imagined the story," I ventured.

"Nothing of the kind; it's all true. I've no patience with such silliness. I wish I had said a great deal more in my book. Do people seriously think that married women in the 'fifties were immaculate? They were every bit as flighty then as they are now, and," she added rather maliciously, "some of the *jeunes filles* were very advanced pupils in the ethics of Love. I remember that an outwardly circumspect

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friend of mine used sometimes to plead a headache when she went to a party, in order to leave the ballroom and pretend to go home to bed. But, instead of doing so, she took a hackney carriage and drove to her lover's rooms, where she passed a delightful hour, although you may be quite sure that she was sound asleep when her mamma and her sisters returned from the ball."

"Is that really a *fact*?" I asked; and when I heard the name of the young lady who suffered from headaches I was devoutly glad that we had not displayed yet another family skeleton in the pages of "My Recollections."

I know that the late King was approached by one of the families, and begged to exercise his prerogative and command the withdrawal of Lady Cardigan's book from circulation; but he refused, and he is reported to have said: "Let Lady Cardigan alone; there's no telling what she will do next if she is interfered with."

Her delight was unbounded when she realised that "My Recollections" was one of the greatest sensations of modern times, and she never flinched when she read the condemnatory notices about herself and her book. Lady Cardigan was the bravest woman that I have ever met, and the most loyal. She never turned on me because of the part I played in writing the book, she never uttered a word of blame when she was both abused and derided, and she held her head every inch as high as she had done in the days when she rode with Lord Cardigan in the Row and Society turned its back upon her.

I went to stay at Deene for a week in the late autumn of 1909, and I was rather pleased, as this was my first experience of a country house-party, and

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I wondered whether it would prove as exciting as smart house-parties were popularly supposed to be.

It was rather late when I arrived, and I had only just time to dress for dinner and hurry down to the hall, where Lady Cardigan was waiting to receive her guests. She looked remarkably well in a pale blue gown trimmed with beautiful old lace; her yellow curls were elaborately dressed, and her old-young eyes were, as usual, the most arresting feature in her face. "Bundle," the waspish-tempered black Pom, kept up a perpetual series of short, sharp barks whenever anyone spoke to its mistress, and as I looked at Lady Cardigan it was again borne upon me that hers was indeed a wonderful personality. The whole *mise-en-scène* also made a strong appeal to my sense of the dramatic: the glorious old hall, with its stained-glass windows and carved chestnut roof, seemed entirely out of touch with modern life, for it recalled more stirring times to my imagination, and I remembered having heard Lady Cardigan say there was a bricked-up entrance which had once led to an underground passage through which dispatches were carried in the Civil War.

I looked at the members of the house-party with some degree of interest. A pretty, auburn-haired woman, with whom I had become friendly in the train, I knew to be Mrs. Moore; a tall, elegant creature was introduced to me as Mrs. Paget—we three were the only ladies; and two of the men, Mr. Pelham (Lady Cardigan's agent) and Ernest Brudenell Bruce, I had previously met at Deanery Street. However, there were "others": Sir Bache Cunard, Edward H. Stanley (later to become the proprietor of the London Opera House), Dr. T. Pink, of Uppingham (who

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knew my friend William Le Queux, and was exactly like one of Randolph Caldecott's hunting-men), poor handsome Harry Bentley, so well known and so sadly missed, and a dapper-looking little naval officer, Captain H. D. Wilkin, D.S.O. I had never seen men in "pink" before, and I thought that the effect produced by the house and its occupants was something in the nature of an autumn melodrama at Drury Lane.

After dinner we went back to the Great Hall, which was now unbearably hot, and the air smelt exactly like that of a church during evening service. I suppose this curious odour is peculiar to places connected with religion, and Deene was formerly a religious house "where," as Lady Cardigan writes in "My Recollections," "monks and nuns lived together, an arrangement that was naturally rather dangerous to the morals of the community."

After the men had joined us, Lady Cardigan went to the piano and sang the ballad of "The Phantom Nun," which was a kind of ritual at Deene for many years. Walter Seymour had written the words, and Lady Cardigan had set them to music, and one of her harmless vanities consisted in declaiming the sorrows of the erring *religieuse* with tremendous dramatic effect.

I can see her now, yellow curls, blue gown, the La France rose over her ear, her bright eyes turned in the direction of her guests, the strange, fascinating old voice, and the insistent imperishable attraction of the woman who had set men's hearts aflame in the long ago. Some subtle essence of her being defied time, was unassailed by age, and the best tribute to her triumphant personality is to acknowledge the incon-

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trovertible fact that she usually made all women, young, beautiful or "smart," look fools beside her.

Lady Cardigan retired before her guests, and about eleven o'clock Knighton, the butler (whose dignified demeanour merited an episcopal see), appeared, carrying two silver candlesticks, and lighted the wonderful *châtelaine* of Deene and her garrulous Pom to bed.

I had often surmised what my hostess must look like without her wig and her multitudinous aids to beauty, but I was told that no one, not even her maid, had ever beheld Lady Cardigan without the girlish yellow curls, and she invariably "made up" her face unassisted.

After our hostess had disappeared we adjourned to the smoking-room, where we sat laughing and talking until the small hours, and, as Mrs. Moore's bedroom was next to mine, neither of us felt in the least afraid of any ghosts who might wish to disturb our somewhat belated slumbers.

The days slipped pleasantly past, and I thoroughly enjoyed my visit. We never saw Lady Cardigan until the luncheon hour—I suppose it took her the whole morning to transform herself from an old woman into the vision of the afternoon and evening. Left to amuse ourselves, Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Paget and I used to explore the house and park after our late breakfast, and we usually drove in the afternoon. The men were away all day until tea-time.

On the last evening before the house-party broke up I was conscious that the air was charged with electricity, and immediately after dinner the storm burst. I was sitting in the smoking-room talking to Violet Moore when I heard some of the men discussing

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Mr. Nash and myself in very uncomplimentary terms, and when I demanded to know by what right they made such unfounded assertions I was instantly subjected to a heated personal attack.

No attempt was made to spare me. I was bluntly told that I was "*le chat qui tirait les marrons*" for Eveleigh Nash, and that I must have well feathered my nest by trading on Lady Cardigan's affection and persuading her to write the much-talked-of book.

I was absolutely taken aback at this uncalled-for rudeness, and Violet Moore bluntly called my accusers a lot of despicable cads. At this awful moment a message from the Great Hall commanded us to join Lady Cardigan, who was blissfully unconscious of what was transpiring under her hospitable roof. We had been sent for to play the enlightening game of "Consequences," and when someone tactlessly introduced the name of Eveleigh Nash the game speedily became a grim reality.

"Yes," remarked Lady Cardigan, who had temporarily forgotten everything else in thinking of her publisher. "Now, dear Mrs. Ffoulkes, don't forget to give Mr. Nash all kinds of nice messages from me when you see him to-morrow."

"Tell Nash to put his head in a bag," said one of the men *sotto voce*.

This was quite enough, and I turned on the speaker like a fury. "Mr. Nash is my friend," I said, trying to control my trembling voice. "I'll not sit here and listen to your insults"—and I rose from my seat and walked out of the Great Hall, heedless of what Lady Cardigan might think of my seemingly unaccountable behaviour.

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I went upstairs to my room, and I am not ashamed to own that I cried bitterly. It seemed so unfair to attack Eveleigh Nash in this unreasonable manner. "He's miles above you *all*," I said to myself; and I felt glad that I had acted impulsively, even at the risk of making a scene in the house where I was staying as a guest.

It was a disastrous ending to my first country-house visit, and the situation next morning was, if possible, worse than the evening before. None of the men spoke to Mrs. Moore and myself, and I think the solicitous stationmaster wondered what dreadful thing had happened to account for the angry looks of the returning members of the Deene house-party.

At Kettering we paced the platform in icy aloofness, and I was heartily glad to find myself once again in my little "Cottage" off Berkeley Square. I naturally told Eveleigh Nash what had occurred, and shortly afterwards I received an ample apology from the chief offenders.

The name of Berkeley Cottage recalls a very happy period to my remembrance when, for five years, I lived in one of the quaintest little houses in London. I first discovered No. 2 Jones Street—as it was then called—in the summer of 1909, when Miss Giulia Strakosch, the niece of Madame Adelina Patti, was its tenant. I was fortunate enough to secure the remainder of Miss Strakosch's lease, and I speedily rechristened the tiny doll's house Berkeley Cottage.

This swallow's nest has been inhabited at different times by many birds of passage, and a Marquis of Conyngham long ago once used it as a sort of *garçonnière*. Berkeley Cottage consists of six rooms, one immediately over the other; there are no landings,

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and you climb the steep stairs somewhat in the manner of a lighthouse. The doors of the rooms slide into the walls, instead of opening in the usual way ; it is the oddest place imaginable. But the " Cottage " was a never-failing source of joy to me : I seemed to be hidden right away from the world in this unfamiliar corner of Mayfair, and in many respects Jones Street might have been in some unknown village, as hardly a cabman in London knew that it existed. A good many people affected to shudder at my temerity in living next to an undertaker, but it never troubled me—except on the occasion when a ready-to-wear coffin was once left at the " Cottage " by mistake. I often chatted to Mr. Dallyn and his pretty young wife, and I reflected that I was really very fortunate in having him as a landlord, as no doubt in the course of time he would take a personal interest in all the arrangements connected with the last home which I should ever require.

My friendship with Eveleigh Nash had now lasted for eight years, and I liked to think that, although I rarely went to Fawside House, I was, nevertheless, associated with everything and everybody within its walls. Guy Bickers was then acting as manager, and it is interesting to remember that Mr. Klingender—now known among publishers as Martin Secker—was first initiated into the mysteries of book producing at Fawside House. I still acted as reader to the firm, but I do not remember having discovered any particular treasure trove in new authors or wonderful manuscripts. I have, however, been told that Compton Mackenzie offered " Carnival " to Eveleigh Nash, and that, by some unaccountable oversight, it was not accepted for publication. I have always been sorry that we

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“missed” the much-admired novel, but, woman-like, I am very glad to think that I was ill and unable to read “Carnival” when it made its fruitless visit to Fawside House.

The year 1910 passed uneventfully, except for unpleasant building operations next to the “Cottage,” which resulted in my being temporarily driven from home, and I became ill during the autumn with a very distressing nervous breakdown. I was utterly miserable, nothing seemed to do me any good; I could not eat, I could not sleep, and during the day I was nearly driven senseless by the incessant hammering in the next house. The unfortunate “Cottage” looked as if it had suffered from the effects of a prolonged bombardment, as it was propped up by “stays”; and, what with illness, noise, and general discomfort, everything around me seemed to be *àt sixes and sevens*.

I became so really ill that I decided to give myself a last chance to get better. The noise made it impossible to remain in the “Cottage” with any degree of comfort, and I and my maid went to a suite of rooms at Grosvenor Court in the hopes of being able to obtain some rest after dwelling in what I can best describe as pandemonium.

Unknown to me, my maid decided to ask Mr. Dallyn if he could recommend a doctor who would deal kindly with the difficult patient who required his services, and my unworldly landlord, who was not anxious to be given the order for my funeral, told her to send for Dr. Brown Thomson. It is a curious fact that I have always met my greatest friends when I have been passing through some acute crisis in my tempestuous career; and just as I made the acquaint-

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ance of Eveleigh Nash when I was mentally ill and miserable, so I made the acquaintance of Dr. Thomson in somewhat similar conditions.

Thanks to his knowledge of how to treat a breakdown, I gradually recovered my health, and went back to Berkeley Cottage determined to make amends for my period of reprehensible inactivity.

The New Year of 1911 found me, notwithstanding my renewed health, utterly unsettled and miserable. I felt that some of the glamour of my friendship with Eveleigh Nash had inexplicably faded, and, in sheer despair, I at last asked him to tell me if I had offended him in any way; and I then learned the truth of how matters really stood.

I had not suspected for one minute that he was beginning to regret having published "My Recollections," but I soon discovered that, in the opinion of several of his friends, the name of Eveleigh Nash was far too highly respected to be associated with those of the Countess of Cardigan and Mrs. Ffoulkes. I gathered, from the gist of his remarks, that he had lost prestige over the book, and I also heard that the verdict of my critics was apparently general: I was not a *nice* woman.

This wounded me beyond words. Eveleigh Nash had always been delighted at the success of "My Recollections," and had never regretted making the large profits of which he now seemed to be ashamed.

"But very few people know me," I said angrily; "how on all the earth can they possibly tell whether I'm nice or nasty? It's absurd."

"Well, apparently the impression is that you are *not* a nice woman," replied Eveleigh Nash, with

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decision. I am now aware that he spoke the truth, and that all kinds of unpleasant personal statements have been circulated about me in connection with my share in the production of "My Recollections." My reply to my critics is that I see no reason why I should have been condemned, as I was simply the recorder of facts supplied me by Lady Cardigan—I was not even the publisher of the book. I do, however, absolutely justify its writing, as I consider that it painted a true and valuable picture of Victorian life which might otherwise have been lost. It was not for me to judge my daily work any more than I should have been in a position to judge the wisdom, accuracy, and value of what Gibbon might have dictated to me. Both are histories.

I think I was, at first, unnecessarily bitter when I knew in what estimation I was held, but when I told Lady Cardigan she laughed and remarked: "Well, my dear. . . . 'They say—let them say.' I've always told you that most people are hypocrites. Take no notice. After all, to be called a 'nice' woman is a rather colourless description."

However, there was more annoyance in store for me. I had been approached with a tentative proposal to write the story of a family whose history has constituted one of the many romances associated with the peerage. I was not disinclined to undertake the work, but I had hesitated to give a definite answer on account of the unsympathetic personality of the lady who was to supply the material. I knew of her well, and I was convinced that I should dislike her as much as I felt sure she would dislike me. But, as I wanted to distract my thoughts, I now intimated that I was quite willing to write the book, only to be told that, after

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much consideration, the lady had arrived at the conclusion that I was not clever enough to be entrusted with her important secrets.

My feelings, when I heard the result of my inquiry, are more easily imagined than described. I knew that this was only one of the many unkind remarks which this particular individual had made, and I positively began to hate the peaceful life which I had hitherto enjoyed.

“What’s the use of trying to keep one’s ideals,” I argued, “when people I don’t even know try to lower me in the eyes of my friends? As for this book, I wouldn’t write it for any money. I am heartily sick of the average Society woman; it will be far better to do something of more real value than merely recording malicious tittle-tattle.”

I was alone in the tiny drawing-room at the “Cottage” when I decided to abjure Society and its trivialities, and I sat gazing at the fire and wondering how I should manage to secure an interesting life-story. At last my wounded feelings stimulated my imagination, and just as nineteen years previously I had been suddenly inspired to run away, just as suddenly the remembrance of the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony flashed meteor-like across the dark heavens of my troubled soul.

Here was the woman above all others who possessed an interesting and exciting past, a member of one of the most romantic Royal Houses, a creature pursued by Destiny, a rebel entirely after my own heart. As I thought of the ex-Crown Princess I became more and more obsessed by the idea of writing her recollections, but where and how was the elusive Louisa to be approached? and I was just thinking out all kinds

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of impossible plans when I remembered the name of William Le Queux.

“The very person!” I cried. I ran downstairs, seized a telegraph form, and wrote :

“Come at once. Must see you urgently about the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony.—MAUDE FFOULKES.”

CHAPTER XIX

THE EX-CROWN PRINCESS OF SAXONY

WELL, what's the matter, Mrs. Ffoulkes?" said William Le Queux, when he arrived at the "Cottage" the next morning. "And what do you want to know concerning the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony?"

I told him everything. "You, at any rate, understand human nature," I said; "it's a mercy that I needn't *pretend* when I'm talking to you. I'm so badly *hurt* just now, Mr. Le Queux. I'm almost a thoroughly 'nasty' woman, I assure you."

"Louisa is a person of moods," said Le Queux reflectively, "but I might be able to persuade her to have a book written if I could go to Italy and see her; an interview is the only possible thing. But where is Louisa?" he continued. "She was in Rimini when I heard from her last, but she may be in Russia to-day, for there is no reliance to be placed upon her doings. Here to-day—gone to-morrow, best describes her movements."

"But do find her," I pleaded. "Mr. Le Queux, be a real friend, and go to Italy in search of the Princess."

"I believe I will!" he cried, with genuine enthusiasm. "It's a great scheme, and you could write a great book. Have you told Eveleigh Nash about it?"

"No," said I; "but I'll ring up and say that you

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and I want to see him on a matter of importance. Oh, Mr. Le Queux, if you can only help me through with this I will never be grateful enough; it means everything to me at the present time."

I accordingly rang up the office, and that evening Le Queux and I unfolded our plan to Eveleigh Nash, who, however, was not very enthusiastic. He undoubtedly wanted another sensational book, but the real reason of his hesitation was solely on account of my health. "You will be sure to have another breakdown, and all the initial outlay will be thrown away," said Eveleigh Nash, in his most discouraging manner.

"I *won't*, I *won't*!" I cried. "Do give me a chance to show what I can do. I want you to believe I am capable of work; please do not refuse. I wasn't wrong over my feeling about the success of Algernon Blackwood's book; I'm not wrong in my feeling over *this*."

William Le Queux added his entreaties to mine. "It's a sporting venture, Nash," said he; "let Mrs. Ffoulkes have her own way. For my part, I am ready to start for Italy as soon as I can ascertain where Louisa is living." At length Eveleigh Nash yielded, and it was arranged that William Le Queux should take the contract with him, ready for the Princess to sign if the Fates were propitious, and that he should wire a sort of code which would enlighten us as to the result of his efforts to secure another sensational book.

Having (by the simple expedient of telegraphing to Florence) ascertained that the Princess was located at Fiesole, William Le Queux went off to Italy, and I waited in suspense for the telegram. Eveleigh Nash was dubious about the advisability of the enterprise,

The Ex-Crown Princess of Saxony

and, as I was still somewhat under the shadow of his displeasure, it may be well imagined that I looked upon this adventure absolutely in the nature of a last hope which would set me on the road towards "niceness" again.

At last the telegram arrived, and when I tore open the envelope I read the words :

"Dresden allright."

This signified that the ex-Crown Princess had not only consented to have her life story written, but, better still, she had signed the contract. My luck was in. William Le Queux returned to London full of almost boyish enthusiasm, and what most appealed to me was his undisguised pleasure in having been able to put a chance of happiness in my way. I had seen Dr. Brown Thomson, and asked him point-blank if he believed I was safe from the possibility of another breakdown. "If I fail, I'm finished *for ever*," I told him.

"You can go to Italy without any danger," said the doctor. "I know that you have conquered this nerve phase. I've no doubt whatever on the subject."

The month of February passed quickly, and the first week in March I went to Italy. William Le Queux had most thoughtfully arranged all the details of my journey, and I knew exactly what to do and where to stay *en route* for Florence. The evening before I left home I had a long talk with Eveleigh Nash which dispersed most of the mists which had lately obscured our friendship.

I must confess to feeling excessively nervous when once I had embarked on the Great Adventure and Eveleigh Nash had waved his parting benediction from the platform at Victoria Station. Up to the time of

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leaving London I had been somewhat *exaltée*, as I regarded this undertaking in the light of a Pilgrimage of Atonement, though if I had been like the majority of people I should not have given the breakdown a second thought. But I have always been rather acutely alive to my shortcomings, and I have also laboured under the disadvantage of other people remembering them.

I broke the journey at Pisa, where I arrived at midnight, and I shall never forget how welcome the soft night air was after the suffocating atmosphere of the Rome express. William Le Queux had directed me to the best hotel, and, heartened and refreshed after a good night's rest, I started early the next morning *en route* for Florence.

As the train slowed into the station I leant out of the carriage window, and I especially noticed a lady who, something told me, was no less a person than the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony herself.

I was not mistaken. Directly I got out of the train she rushed forward with outstretched hands, saying impulsively : "I am sure you are Mrs. Ffoulkes ; I recognised you from your photograph. Have you had a pleasant journey? You must be very tired." I felt pleased at the warmth of my reception, as I had hitherto imagined Royal greetings to be somewhat frigid, and I had been wondering ever since I left Pisa how I should be received by the ex-Crown Princess.

My first impressions of Louisa of Saxony are unforgettable. There was absolutely no trace of the accepted idea of an Imperial Princess in this charming woman, dressed with the utmost simplicity in a dark-coloured coat and skirt, a muslin blouse, and a large hat profusely trimmed with osprey. She was of

The Ex-Crown Princess of Saxony

medium height, her figure was good, and her face was one of the sweetest I have ever seen. Her features were Austrian in type, but they also faintly recalled those of the Bourbons, and her blue eyes might easily have belonged to Marie Antoinette, whose tragic expression of "destiny" was repeated in the eyes of her luckless descendant.

But it was the magnetism of her personality which first attracted me so strongly. I think that few women possess her powers of fascination. The ex-Crown Princess casts her glamour over all those with whom she comes in contact; you cannot judge her, you cannot blame her, you can only love her; and at last you end by believing that you would willingly lay down your life in her service. This, I imagine, was the kind of spell which the Stuarts exercised over their followers, and she makes the same appeal to the heart which long ago in Austria caused strong men to be carried away with enthusiasm and to cry: "Let us die for our 'King,' Maria Theresa."

The Princess and I walked down the platform, she laughing and talking with the utmost freedom, and I was amused at the businesslike way in which Louisa superintended the disposal of my luggage. She arranged for it to be taken to Fiesole, and bargained at great length with the driver over the price; then, hailing one of the little carriages which are such familiar sights in Florence, we drove off at a great pace.

The Princess was delightful, and as I glanced at her pretty animated face I could not help thinking that she seemed to have outlived most of her cares, as no one would ever have imagined that the woman beside me had experienced the stormy adventures

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which had caused the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony to be the most discussed Royalty in Europe.

"I have so longed to see you, Mrs. Ffoulkes," she said in excellent English. "Directly Mr. Le Queux told me about you I knew that we should become friends. Dear Mr. Le Queux, how kind he is, and what an excellent idea that I should write a book." Her sunny face suddenly clouded. "Yes, this book must be my vindication in the eyes of my darling children. I am sorry for the King; but he is weak, and he must always expect to suffer because of his fatal weakness of character."

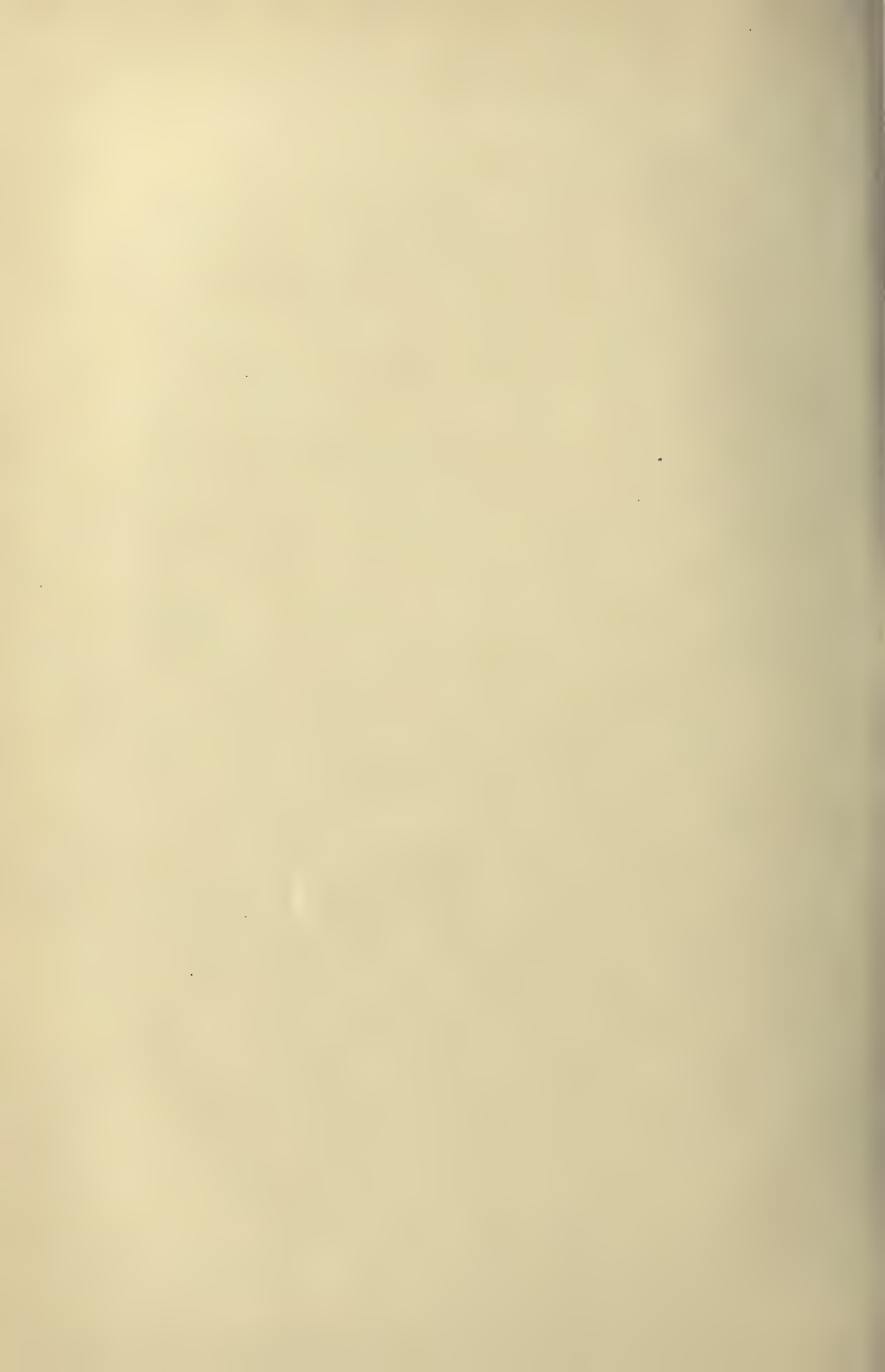
Her voice was hard, and the laughing woman of a moment or two ago was now suddenly transformed into a mourning mother and an outraged Queen. Then she began to laugh again. "Dear Mrs. Ffoulkes," she cried, "I'm really tiresome. I assure you that Frederick August bored me to tears; and as for the Court—you can't imagine anything more horrible. It's composed of priests, ugly, uninteresting women, and a lot of silly military men. Don't let us talk of Dresden. Here I am at last free and happy in my beloved Italy, the home of my ancestors. Look yonder, have you ever seen anything quite so beautiful?" The little carriage was now toiling slowly up the steep hill which leads to Fiesole; around us stretched a glorious panorama of distant mountains, and the countryside was bathed in the delightful March sunshine. The exhilarating air seemed completely to banish all the fatigues of my long journey, and I decided that the world was really a very pleasant place to live in after all.

We passed the historic Medici Villa, with its sombre avenue of cypresses, and in a few moments the carriage



Photograph by SCHEMPP & CO.

THE EX-CROWN PRINCESS OF SAXONY



The Ex-Crown Princess of Saxony

stopped at the Hotel Aurora, where I had arranged to stay. "Now," cried Louisa, "come with me; I've seen to everything, and I think you will be comfortable. You will sleep in the room I occupied when I first came to Fiesole; but," she added, with a touch of cynical sadness, "I hope your slumbers will be more peaceful than mine."

I followed her upstairs, and she threw open a door, saying as she did so: "Now, do tell me you are pleased, my dear friend. Can you smell anything?"

Could I smell anything? What a question, when the whole air was drenched with the fragrance of violets! On a table in front of the open window were masses of purple and white violets, pink and red carnations, faintly sweet freesias, and a big bunch of waxen Niphetos roses.

"I arranged them for you this morning," she said simply. I have always been a creature of impulse, and I was now absolutely fascinated by the magic of Louisa's personality. "Oh, Princess," I cried, "I feel as if I could never love you enough. You have suffered so cruelly, and, now that I have actually seen you, I feel as if I would like to go straight to Dresden and assassinate the King of Saxony and everyone else who has dared to make you unhappy."

"You are a dear," she exclaimed, and she kissed me as she spoke. "You shall be my sister, and we will work together at my wonderful book; it will succeed—it must. But now I will leave you, and after you have rested you will come to my villa, won't you? and I will introduce you to my husband and my darling little Bubi."

Left alone, I examined my surroundings with interest. The room was large and comfortably

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furnished, and from the balcony I could see Florence lying far below in a sort of basin surrounded by hills. It was a magnificent view, the reviving air blew fresh and sweet from the distant mountains, and I thought that, so far, the Fates seemed disposed to be kind to me in my new venture. There was one odd feature in this pleasant room which slightly robbed it of its charm, as the walls were decorated with marble slabs which recorded the names of the various Royalties who had slept there. This strange mural adornment was exactly similar to the memorial tablets displayed inside churches, and it made me instinctively think of the dead and not the living.

The tablets in my case were expected to divert attention from the necessity which had rendered the bathroom useful only as a store-room, for when I asked whether I could have a bath I was informed that it was, alas! impossible; but did not the Signora think that she could manage with much hot water brought to her in this beautiful bedroom, so beloved by Royalty? Doubtless the Signora Inglese had already noticed the name of Queen Margharita? Would not the arrangement of the foot-bath suit the Signora? I was suitably reproved, and, after I had performed some gymnastic exercises in a small zinc tub, I changed my gown, lunched happily on the terrace, and then set out for the Villa Paganucci.

The road which led to the villa was "broken" in the most literal sense of the word, as it presented the appearance of having been used as a dumping ground for every sort of debris, and, like Agag, I walked carefully. Bits of crockery, broken glass, clinkers, scraps of iron, and enormous pebbles came into conflict with my shoes and impeded my progress; but at last I

The Ex-Crown Princess of Saxony

arrived at a white house, not much larger than an ordinary suburban residence, which proclaimed itself as the "Villa Paganucci."

I was admitted by a smiling Italian maidservant, and shown into a small room opening immediately off the hall, where I was left to await the Princess. I must confess to having experienced a slight feeling of disappointment, as I had expected to see traces of Louisa's strong personality in her house. I was disappointed. The room was positively uninteresting and everything in it was painfully new; there were no comfortable chairs, no pictures or china, no books of any description. The colour scheme was red, and the walls, curtains and carpet were one vivid blaze of crimson. A writing-table in the corner was almost covered with photographs of the Royal children, and a large platinotype of the King of Saxony was somewhat conspicuously displayed in an ornate silver frame. But the room was uncomfortable, and it suggested nothing except a furniture shop; there was an "unrestful" feeling about it, just like a scene hurriedly set for the stage, to be quickly dismantled when once the curtain was down.

The Princess did not leave me long alone, and I thought she looked charming in a quaint white woollen gown, girded at the waist with a silken cord. Her arms were bare, and I noticed her lovely slender hands, with the almond-shaped "cushioned" nails, a legacy from her Bourbon ancestors. She sat down beside me on the scarlet couch, and I could not help thinking how utterly out of her environment she seemed in this ugly house which smelt of new mortar and new furniture. It was no home for her, and I am sure that Louisa must have read my thoughts.

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“You are, perhaps, surprised that I have chosen such an out-of-the-way retreat,” said she; “but the air is good, and I don’t get ‘mobbed’—that alone is a consideration. Besides, what does it matter where one lives? Houses don’t trouble me, and I much prefer this one to the Palace at Dresden.”

“I can’t understand that,” I said bluntly. “You can surround yourself with beauty in a palace; it’s different here.”

“Yes,” she admitted, “I suppose it is. But there is one blessing in being born a Habsburg: we can accommodate ourselves to any conditions of life. Why, my brother Leopold once lived in a tree somewhere in Switzerland.” The Princess then told me how the Archduke Leopold had renounced his titles and dignities for the love of a pretty girl whom he had met wandering at night in the streets of Vienna. The impetuous Archduke at once apprised the Emperor of his intention to marry the girl he had so romantically rescued, and Francis Joseph, furious at another Habsburg running amuck in his love affairs, threatened his relative with all the pains and penalties which usually follow the glaring indiscretions of an Austrian Archduke.

“What fresh disgrace do you contemplate bringing upon your family?” fiercely demanded the perturbed monarch. “Your early follies were bad enough, but this marriage is the worst of your many reprehensible actions.”

The Archduke regarded Francis Joseph unmoved; then he laughed rudely. “You, sir, are a fine person to preach morality to us,” he mocked. “Why, your relations with Frau Schratt are common property, everybody knows what a *bourgeois* you are, and,

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indeed, you are as often as not alluded to by your subjects as Herr Schratt."

After such plain speaking the Archduke Leopold speedily left Vienna, and after a few months he and his bride obliterated themselves, and went to an unfrequented part of Switzerland to lead the simple life. There, unfettered by convention, they wore primitive garments, allowed their toe-nails to run wild, and for a time fed contentedly upon roots and berries, varied by a diet of milk and eggs. This new Adam and Eve slept in shelters which the Archduke had constructed in trees, and they existed in blissful oblivion of the caste prejudices peculiar to the aged autocrat who rules over Austria-Hungary.

But suddenly the Archduke experienced one of the impish vagaries of the Habsburg temperament. He regretted the flesh-pots of Vienna, and turned away in disgust from the simple root and the succulent berry; he also thought that his appearance, as seen in the waters of the stream, was not exactly that of a Narcissus, and he remembered with regret his purple and fine linen of former days. Leopold was a man of deeds, and he lost no time in going to the nearest town, where he spent a happy day in being restored somewhat to the semblance of his original self. He then returned to the encampment of the simple life, with the praiseworthy intention of persuading his wife to undergo a similar process of renovation. But when he approached the family "tree," he was horror-stricken to observe a hideous form descending the rude ladder which served as a staircase. The Archduke marked its downward progress with fascinated horror; its hair was matted, its face tanned, its primitive garments left nothing to the imagination, and with icy terror in his heart he

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realised that this *Thing* was none other than his wife, with whom he had hitherto lived in great content. "A Habsburg lapse was responsible for my marriage," he reflected, "and a Habsburg lapse will now be responsible for my leaving my wife"; and, turning his back upon the simple life, he went back to civilisation. "So, you see," said the Princess, "we are often quite independent of environment."

"Yes," said I, "but perhaps *you* will regret having left Dresden some day."

She sighed. "Ah! I've already regretted it." At this moment the door was pushed timidly open, and a little boy entered; the Princess was instantly all smiles, she opened her arms. "Bubi, my darling, come to me. Mrs. Ffoulkes, this is Bubi, my son by Signor Toselli." The child gave me his hand, and gazed at me gravely; he was slight and delicate looking, with brown eyes and lint-coloured hair, utterly unlike the child of an Italian father. "Why, he's a German type!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," said the Princess, "Bubi is another instance of the ironic manner in which Fate treats the Habsburgs. This child, who ought by right to have some Italian characteristics, possesses none whatever. He is exactly like the children of the King of Saxony."

I made the acquaintance of Signor Toselli at dinner; he was younger than the Princess, fairly good-looking, but certainly not as distinguished in appearance as the King of Saxony. Enrico Toselli's chief characteristic was a kind of impulsive childishness—"pettish" is the word which best describes him. He was as variable as an April day, and very often his moods were excessively trying.

The dining-room at the villa, like the boudoir, was

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absolutely uninteresting. There was a beautiful service of silver plate which had been sent from Dresden with the rest of the Princess's personal property, and I greatly admired some really exquisite glass. The tablecloth was inset with strips of old Italian lace, and a silver basket filled with oranges served as a centre-piece. Louisa, looking like a mediæval princess in her straight, white gown, sat at the head of the table, with me on her right, and Signor Toselli and Bubi at her left. An air of severe simplicity characterised the meal, which consisted of soup, fish, an entrée, and some fruit; there was none of the luxury and extravagance with which gossip credited the Princess; she and I drank water, but Signor Toselli, like most Italians, preferred wine.

I could not help thinking how strange everything was in this extraordinary *ménage*: here was a woman who had once possessed all the world could give her, and who had apparently renounced it without a pang. But *had* she? Or was her life something akin to the tortures endured by the Spartan boy? And as this idea struck me, I looked at her with ever-increasing interest. At times she was vivacious; her blue eyes sparkled, and her pretty face was all smiles; but just as quickly her expression changed, her animation faded, she became listless, and she seemed suddenly to become plunged in unhappy thoughts.

Signor Toselli teased the grave little boy most unmercifully, and the child appeared to regard his father with mixed feelings of affection and dislike. The Signor asked me many questions about London, where he had performed as a "child pianist," and he appeared to appreciate England and the English. But he indulged in some excessively tactless remarks about his

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wife's family which served to prejudice me against him.

"Do you see that silver fruit-basket, madame?" he said. "Well, it was a present to my wife from Queen Carola of Saxony. Rather a cheap sort of present for a Queen to give, eh? But Royalties are usually a miserly crowd."

The Princess smiled a little contemptuously. "I don't think, Enrico," she replied, "that Mrs. Ffoulkes can possibly be interested in knowing whether we are generous or the reverse."

"Well," he retorted, "you cannot admit with any degree of truth that the allowance you receive from the King of Saxony is at all adequate for your rank."

"Frederick August probably imagines that money which would seem a trifle to the Queen of Saxony represents wealth to Signora Toselli," said Louisa coldly.

I felt sorry for the Princess; it seemed rather thoughtless of Signor Toselli to mention Dresden under the present circumstances, but I discovered later that he rarely missed an opportunity of alluding to his wife's former position as Crown Princess of Saxony, and like a good patriot he never failed to revile the much-hated name of the Emperor of Austria.

After dinner we adjourned to Signor Toselli's sanctum, where he interpreted Chopin on the beautiful grand piano which had formerly adorned Louisa's boudoir at Dresden. Once again I was impressed by the poignant human appeal of the exiled Princess; she leant back in her chair, closed her eyes, her hands were loosely clasped, the colour died out of her face, her whole appearance gave a subtle suggestion of martyrdom, and she seemed unconsciously to crystallise in

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herself all the fatality and sorrow which for centuries have dogged the footsteps of her doomed race.

As Signor Toselli played Chopin's melancholy and sensuous nocturnes, I could see that the Princess rejoiced in the melody which filled the quiet night with beauty; and I listened, astonished at the change which had come over the querulous, mocking young man of an hour ago. For Signor Toselli's soul had awakened, and he played as his soul commanded; his face was inspired, and I now began to understand a little of the attraction which he exercised over the mind of the Princess.

"Crash! Bang! Boum!" The ripple of lovely sounds entirely ceased, and Toselli said simply: "I'm thirsty, Louisa; I want a bottle of beer." I stared at him in amazement, and then I looked from him to the Princess; she shivered slightly. "Oh, Enrico," she sighed, "I was so happy. Why do you want beer in the middle of a nocturne?"

"I want beer because I'm thirsty," he answered. "Ring for Marietta, and tell her to bring me a bottle."

"Marietta has gone to bed," said his wife. "I will fetch you some." He nodded approvingly, and when she returned, he filled his tall glass so carelessly that the frothy liquid ran down the sides and settled in a little pool on the polished wood of the piano. I thought that this was indeed a strange evening, where Tragedy rubbed shoulders with Comedy, and I looked at the Princess of many sorrows, the odd young Italian, the music-strewn room, the piano which suggested a palace, and the bottled beer of ordinary life. It was all painfully incongruous, as brutal as a picture by Hogarth, as tragic as a page from Balzac. I never dreamed that life could hold such ironies.

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“Poor Mrs. Ffoulkes looks quite shocked,” said the Princess lightly. “My dear, do not distress yourself. It is very simple. I adore Chopin, Enrico adores Chopin, and refreshes his muse with beer. *Voilà tout!*”

When I bade my hostess good night, Signor Toselli insisted upon walking down to the Hotel Aurora with me. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the descent of the broken road was thus luckily rendered less difficult for my unaccustomed feet. I asked Signor Toselli whether he liked Fiesole; he shrugged his shoulders. “It is my wife’s whim to live here,” he answered. “For myself, I adore Florence. There is not a single cinema in this desert of a place.”

CHAPTER XX

WITH THE PRINCESS AT FIESOLE

THE Princess and I commenced work the next morning, and when I arrived at the villa I found her ready waiting for me in the little red room. We lost no time in discussing the best scheme to adopt in writing "My Own Story," and I ventured to suggest the advisability of sparing the feelings of the King of Saxony as much as possible. "It's positively disarming," I told her, "to love your enemy in print; besides, the King is the only person in the world who can be of any practical use to you." "Except my son, 'Tia,'" she interposed hastily; "I know that when 'Tia' is his own master he will never allow me to be unhappy. He's a darling, with all the good impulses and generous feelings of the Habsburgs."

"But your daughters are surely charming?" The Princess made a little *moué*. "Oh, Monica is sweet, but the other little girls are very much princesses, I assure you."

The notes for "My Own Story" were obtained on the same principle as the notes for "My Recollections," and the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony was tireless in her efforts to help me with my task. I can never forget her absolute thoroughness as a collaborator; she never allowed her interest to flag, she never permitted anything or anybody to disturb her during the hours which were devoted to work; she discussed

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the different aspects of difficult problems with the skill of a diplomat, and she stirred my imagination by her vivid and humorous accounts of the intrigues and jealousies which flourish, upas-like, in a Royal palace.

I spoke very plainly to the Princess before I began to ask her about her life at Dresden. "You must not think me prompted by vulgar curiosity," I said, "but I can't write a true picture of you if you keep me in the dark. Be frank; it's the only possible way for us to understand each other."

"Of course I will be frank," she replied. "Why not? You must already be aware of the stories which have been circulated about me. You know, of course, that I am supposed to have had any number of lovers."

"I don't care if you have had thousands," I answered. "It would be surprising indeed if men did not lose their heads over you."

"Ah!" she said, "I wonder if anyone will ever love me as I wish to be loved? There has been something lacking in the affection of all who have loved me. It has never been quite the real thing. Frederick August loved me because he was told that it was his duty to do so; Giron's chivalrous love only lasted long enough to compromise me; and Enrico's devotion is somewhat in the nature of the clinging dependence of a child. I had imagined that my strength of character would be useful to him; I asked nothing better than to inspire his genius, to be to him what Georges Sand was to Chopin. I had once such glorious day-dreams; they are all gone. Enrico does not apparently care to develop his really wonderful gifts," she added sadly.

Gradually the tragedy of the Princess's life-story was unrolled before my often tear-filled eyes, and I worked with an immense sorrow in my heart for her.

With the Princess at Fiesole

As I knew her better, I pitied her more and more, and her simple dignity invested her with all the attributes of romance. In fancy I again see her sitting beside me in the ugly, commonplace room, and I remember that she used to keep a number of lead pencils ready sharpened, and she would hand me a fresh one directly she noticed that the point of the one I was using had begun to wear down.

The Princess was curiously methodical in all her doings, and the pencils were cut with the scrupulous neatness which was so characteristic of her. We usually worked from ten until one every morning, and then I had *déjeuner* with her and Bubi, for Signor Toselli was often in Florence, and did not return to Fiesole until the evening.

The bathroom at the villa was on the ground floor, and I really liked it better than the living-rooms. It was large and lofty, with a painted frieze of dolphins disporting themselves, and there was much white enamel and many bright nickel fittings. Thither we came to wash our hands when we had finished work, and the Princess always insisted on filling the basin for me, and bringing me the soap and towels herself. "It is only what I like to do," she said, when I remonstrated.

Those people interested in the domesticities of Royalties may like to know that the Crown Princess used nothing but violet soap, which was sent from Paris in large quantities; she did not care for perfume; a "sigh" of it sufficed her, and she was perfectly indifferent to any of the various aids to beauty which are usually so essential to most women. Her clothes were well cut and simple, but her blouses were elaborate, and she greatly affected Irish crochet, with

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which many of her blouses and some of her exquisitely fine lingerie were trimmed. Her lingerie was the very last word in daintiness, and everything was embroidered with her cypher of the entwined L and the Crown of Austria. The Princess showed me her pretty things with all the enjoyment of a child, and she was particularly anxious that I should admire the great cupboard where quantities of fine linen were arranged in neat piles. Each set was tied up with broad ribbon; the best quality was distinguished by blue, the second-best was gay with orange, and I think there must have been dozens of everything necessary for household use.

Her bedroom was a large, light room, and the view from the windows was lovely. The only real note of individuality in the whole house was to be found in the shape of the Princess's bed, which was on an entirely different artistic plane to that of the glaring colour-scheme and the hideous modern furniture downstairs. She had ordered it to be copied from a wonderful bed once the property of a great courtesan of many loves, who had flourished during the gorgeous period of the Renaissance. It was made of heavily carved black oak; the bed itself was almost on the ground, set in the middle of a low platform which completely encircled it and was reached by two steps. I have never seen anything so extraordinary as this bed, and it was so large that it seemed to take up all the available space. There were no pillows visible—I suppose they appeared at night—and during the day a long, hard bolster covered with rose-red brocade was put outside the plain brocaded coverlet, which was edged with dull-gold lace.

"This beautiful thing proves that you must appreciate beauty," I said, when I first noticed the Renais-

With the Princess at Fiesole

sance bed. "It seems odd that you can live contentedly with the rest of the ugly furniture."

"The furniture doesn't trouble me at all," she replied, "and I only had this bed made because I admired the woman who had slept in the original."

There is not the slightest doubt that the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony is a woman whose character is a mass of contradictions. She possesses all the romance of the Habsburgs, leavened with the practical common sense of an ordinary middle-class housewife. Nobody knows better than herself how to extract the greatest value out of a shilling, and she knew, to a fraction, the current prices of everything which was used in her kitchen. No tradesman ever got the better of a bargain with the Princess, and I cannot imagine how the reports of her extravagance first originated, as I consider her—to speak frankly—rather "careful" than otherwise in her mode of life. I dare say she spent a good deal of her income on dress, and I know that she paid ruinous prices for her hats, but no doubt these luxuries were easily balanced by her other petty economies.

At times the Princess in her reasserted itself, when she loved to talk of her ancestors who had made history, and she would often speak regretfully of her lost position as Queen of Saxony. We had many times discussed the question as to the advisability of leaving one's "cage," and I told the Princess all about my early adventures. "That is why you understand me so perfectly," she answered; "we have both been prisoners, and both of us have escaped."

"Yes," I said, "but there's a wide difference between my sort of home and yours. I should have thought twice before running away from Dresden."

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“Shall I tell you what I wished to do, above all things, when I was shut up in my palace?” said the Princess. “I longed to be able to post a letter myself—to drop it in the pillar-box just like any ordinary person—and I was never able to do so until I left Dresden.”

On another occasion, when we were discussing the ways of men and their capacities for affection, I asked a rather daring question. “You never mind my speaking frankly,” said I. “I wish you would tell me something about which I have always been most curious.”

“And what is that? I’ll tell you anything.”

“Well, I’ve often wondered whether Kings and other great personages who marry for reasons of State are affectionate towards each other during the honeymoon. I’ve hitherto pictured a Royal honeymoon as a desperately dull affair. Did you enjoy yours? That is what I should like to know, if you’re not offended.”

“Not in the least,” she answered; “it’s rather amusing. I suppose,” she added, “the public does wonder if Kings and Queens ever call each other ‘My darling.’ Oh, Maude, if you could only imagine half the disappointment which my honeymoon was to me. Well, I’ve already told you that I was married at the Hofburg, and that the Emperor Francis Joseph lent us his Castle of Hradschin, where we were to pass a couple of days before leaving for Dresden on November 24th.

“Of course, it was all very strange to me when I found myself alone in the Emperor’s private train with Frederick August, and I realised that I was actually his wife. I had my ideas of love, like most girls, and I longed for him to take me in his arms

With the Princess at Fiesole

and forget everything except that we two were just a man and a woman who cared for each other. But we were both nervous, and the after effects of a heavy luncheon, farewell tears, and nerves, combined with the motion of the train, made me fall fast asleep in my seat, and Frederick August quickly followed my example.

“I was the first to awaken, and as I looked at my husband, who was still dozing, I thought that he was really a very handsome man, and I wanted him to say that he loved me, just like any other husband would do to his newly-made bride. So I waited, all anxiety; and at last Frederick August yawned prodigiously, stretched his arms above his head, and stared hard at me—without speaking.

“I smiled timidly. ‘He’s rather *peculiar*,’ I thought; ‘I do wish he’d *say* something.’ But he still stared as if he were considering the importance of a really great thought.

“I waited, and in a few moments he bent forward. ‘Louisa,’ said Frederick August very gravely, ‘do you think that we shall have any children?’

“I was horribly taken aback at this business-like question. And then I thought of Mamma’s injunctions to remember that I should, perhaps, one day become the mother of a future King of Saxony. *She* hadn’t mentioned love, any more than Frederick August had done, and I didn’t know exactly the right sort of answer to make.

“‘I suppose that’s what we have been married for,’ I said lamely. And now, my dear Maude, you have my own experience, and I don’t suppose that there is really much romance about any Royal honeymoon. Frederick August was dull, simply because he

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had had no experience of women ; in fact, King George had not even countenanced his son looking at a statue or a picture which was not, so to speak, properly dressed. My honeymoon was an altogether unfortunate experience for one of the temperamental Habsburgs, I assure you."

I agreed most thoroughly with the Princess, but, deep in my heart, I thought that Frederick August was infinitely preferable to Signor Toselli. The more I saw of him the more I feared for the future of the Princess, although, doubtless, if Enrico Toselli had married a woman in his own sphere he would have proved quite an admirable husband. He was a charming musician and composer, and I remember his exquisite setting for the "*Chanson d'Avril*" and some haunting "flower" songs. But his talent was erratic, and I always felt inclined to apply the same words to him that my stepfather had once applied to me: "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

Signor Toselli was, curiously enough, a good "medium," and, as the Princess at that time was dabbling in Spiritualism and automatic writing, we had several after-dinner séances at the Villa Paganucci.

The Princess told me that at one "sitting," previous to my arrival in Italy, the earth-bound spirit of her ill-fated lover, Bindo Peruzzi di Medici, had informed her that he was suffering torments of punishment for his act of self-destruction, as his spirit was forced to remain in company with his decaying body and to witness all the attendant horrors of corruption. Louisa related that Bindo had rung her up on the telephone the moment before he fired the fatal shot and told her what he was about to do, and how, half

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distracted with terror, she had listened in vain for him to speak after he had once faintly whispered "Farewell."

"My father has also returned," said the Princess, "and given me a message. Poor Papa! What do you think he most craved for? His one wish was to smell the bouquet of the Tuscan wine which he used to drink during his lifetime!"

One evening when I was "assisting" at table-turning in the semi-darkness of the dining-room, the taps announced that the spirit of Marie Antoinette wished to speak to the Princess, and Louisa, greatly excited, translated the Queen's message for my edification.

"Ah, my poor child," commiserated the spirit, "I pity you from the bottom of my heart. But, alas! you have not the supreme consolations which enabled me to live through the agony of the Conciergerie, and to mount the scaffold with fortitude."

At this juncture the fiery patriotism of Toselli conquered his mediumistic tendencies, and he stopped communing with the spirits just as suddenly as he had stopped playing Chopin's nocturnes. Bang!—over went the table—and Toselli exclaimed angrily: "Get out of the house, you hateful Austrian! What right have you to pity *my* wife?"

"How rude!" said the Princess in icy tones. "Marie Antoinette will most certainly not be at all favourably impressed with my choice of you as a husband."

The weeks passed quickly, and I was rapidly nearing the completion of my notes, thanks to the untiring energy of the Princess, who never missed a morning's work, although she had insisted occasionally on driving

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with me to Florence and showing me the beauties of the historic city. I had, by this time, made the acquaintance of the Algar Thorolds, Algernon Blackwood having most kindly asked them to call upon me during my stay at Fiesole. They were charming people, nephew and niece of Henry Labouchere, which I thought must surely partly account for their interesting personalities, and Teresa Thorold is one of the most picturesque-looking women that I have ever seen. I spent two or three happy afternoons at the beautiful suite of rooms in the old palazzo where she and her husband lived, and one day Mrs. Thorold told me that her uncle, who was very anxious to meet me, had sent me an invitation to dine at the Villa Cristina.

I was naturally delighted at the prospect of meeting Henry Labouchere, and I would cheerfully give up a year of my life to live over again the couple of hours which I spent in his company on that memorable evening. We were quite a small party, and directly I was introduced to Henry Labouchere my thoughts reverted to Lady Cardigan, for the genial cynic of the Villa Cristina possessed the same almost uncannily bright eyes, and their expression was also practically identical. I remember how interested I was in the personality of the famous man, who sat watching everything and everybody with the amused cynicism which springs from perfect and intimate knowledge of human nature. I thought that Teresa Thorold looked like a Botticelli portrait in her picturesque gown, and there was another really lovely girl cousin whose name I have unfortunately forgotten.

After dinner we went into the library, where the warm air was scented with the "bookish" aroma of calf and russia leather bindings, and Henry Labouchere

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motioned me to come and sit near him by the great wood fire.

“Do you play bridge, Mrs. Ffoulkes?” he asked; and, upon receiving an answer in the negative, he continued, “That’s good. Then let us talk; I am greatly interested in you and your work; indeed, I think the Cardigan book is really a classic.”

I was flattered to know in what estimation my work was held by Mr. Labouchere, and I told him about the outcry which had been raised against me. “Why trouble about such trifles?” he said. “You must surely be aware that life would lose much of its savour if that useful animal, the scapegoat, were extinct.” We discussed all kinds of subjects, and he was much interested in my friendship with the ex-Crown Princess. “But why did she make the fatal mistake of marrying Toselli?” he demanded; and when I said that the Princess thought that as a wife she would be immune from slander, Labouchere remarked drily: “Well, I’ll allow there is some reason in the Princess wishing for a husband to protect her, but surely it was not necessary to have a child.” His observations were cynical, entirely worldly, and his outlook suggested the good-humoured tolerance with which fools are invariably regarded by the wise man.

I do not think that Henry Labouchere was as cynical as his remarks might have led one to suppose. A beautiful portrait of the late Mrs. Labouchere was hanging in the library, and I told her husband how greatly I admired it. “You must miss her dreadfully,” said I; “she looks a charming woman.” “Yes, she was certainly charming,” replied Mr. Labouchere. “But as for missing her—I have not yet definitely made up my mind as to whether I do or

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whether I don't." His strange eyes sparkled with mischief as he spoke, and I am sure that one of his chief pleasures consisted in trying to see how much he could shock the people for whose benefit his often outrageous remarks were made.

Henry Labouchere possessed an inexhaustible fund of piquant anecdote, and he told me many interesting things about Florence and its inhabitants. "There is a good deal of Black Magic still practised," he said, "and the value of human life is esteemed very lightly. Indeed, for a 'consideration,' it is possible to have any undesirable person swiftly and silently 'removed.' I remember once that a man I had befriended came to see me and told me that he wished to make some small return for my kindness to him. 'Have you anyone whom you would like to have "removed," Signor?' he asked, fingering a gloomy-looking knife as he spoke. 'If so, say the word, and you can consider the thing accomplished.' 'This is indeed a friendly suggestion,' I said gratefully, 'but, unfortunately, I can't avail myself of your offer. All my relations are at present in America.'

"If you are really interested in Black Magic and soothsayers," continued Mr. Labouchere, "I believe there is quite a celebrated disciple of the Devil who lives away at the top of an old palazzo in the Via ——. Why don't you go and consult him?"

"I will," I said, "and I'll persuade the Princess to come with me."

"I shall look forward to another visit from you," said my host when I bade him good night. "And I, too," I answered, "for I can truthfully say that I've never before passed such an entirely pleasant evening." We were, however, never destined to meet on this side

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of Eternity, but I always hope that the spirit of Henry Labouchere has been permitted to retain some traces of his delightful earthly personality; if so, it will be really refreshing to renew our acquaintance.

The ex-Crown Princess was much interested when I described my visit to the Villa Cristina, and she decided that it would be very exciting to consult the fortune-teller. We accordingly asked a friend of the Thorolds (Mr. Reginald Temple) to accompany us, and, with the pleasurable anticipation of being thoroughly frightened, we toiled up endless stairs until we reached the topmost storey of the palazzo, where the sorcerer had installed himself in a flat whose tropical atmosphere was heavy with the combined odours of garlic and cats.

The room in which we waited was profusely decorated with many photographs of dashing-looking officers and ladies whose profession proclaimed itself in the highways. The Princess, who was heavily veiled, appeared to enjoy the situation, but Reginald Temple, a fastidious soul, was, I think, suffering most acutely from the effects of garlic "gassing."

Suddenly the door opened, and a short, swarthy man entered. He must have been somewhat of a "dog" in private life, as he sported most conspicuous plaid trousers, a blue coat, and a fancy waistcoat draped with a large brassy chain. The little fat man took us all in with one swift glance of his keen, dark eyes, then beckoned the Princess and myself to come with him into an inner apartment, from which the fumes of many bygone dinners came forth to welcome us.

"Will the ladies please to be seated?" he asked, indicating an uncleanly sofa. "To what do I owe the unexpected honour of your visit?"

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"We have heard of your powers, and we wish to consult you," said the Princess.

His eyes twinkled. "Most willingly I place myself at your disposal. Have you come to purchase a love-philtre? because I possess recipes potent enough to lure even the Holy Father out of the Vatican, and I can draw men as the moon draws the tides. With one draught it is possible to unlock the gates of Passion and transform an iceberg into a volcano." He paused, sipped a little orange-flower water, and continued in more impressive tones: "If it is not Love, then perhaps it is Hate which has brought you here. Is he who owns your heart unfaithful? No lover has the right to prove untrue—infidelity is the prerogative of husbands alone. Or you may even possess an enemy, one who encumbers the gracious earth—who would be far better lying deep in the waters of the Arno. For five hundred lire, ladies, such a one might instantly commence to say his prayers. His hours are numbered!"

"But that is murder!" said I aghast.

"Oh no, Signora—that is a most unlovely word," reproved the little man. "It is simply Christian charity which prompts me to do another person a service."

"Now, Signor," said the Princess, extending her ungloved hand, "tell me what destiny has in store for me." The fortune-teller instantly became interested; he looked intently at the veiled lady. "Oh, Signora," he murmured, "from what heights have you fallen, and what tragedies are still in store for you! I see partings which tear the heart, and loneliness which enshrouds you to the end of your days. I see——" But he suddenly released her hand. "Pardon me,

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Signora, but I cannot tell you more—it is better that I should be silent.” Nothing would induce him to say anything further; the fat man refused point-blank to discuss the question of the future, and he then asked me to show him my hand.

The vendor of love-philtres told me much that was true respecting my past life, and he was optimistic about my future up to a certain stage. “I see success,” he said, “I see a long friendship, but I see much trouble in store for you through two women who will prove to be your most bitter enemies.” He then described the various annoyances and anxieties which I should experience, and I was really glad when he had finished warning me against men and women in general. “You do not belong to them,” he said in conclusion; “an older life claims you, and to that older life you must return.”

He accepted his fees with lofty indifference, and we then rejoined Reginald Temple, who was gazing miserably out over the roofs, after having been worsted in a sharp tussle with the window, which obstinately refused to open.

We all lunched together, but Mr. Temple turned green at the bare mention of garlic. “My clothes are full of it,” he said disconsolately. “I never want to smell it again.”

Later in the afternoon the Princess and I went to the Pitti Palace, and as we wandered through what had formerly been the home of her ancestors, I saw that she seemed to be enveloped in a veil of brooding melancholy. She hardly spoke, but occasionally she stopped before the various portraits of long dead and gone members of her house, and regarded them critically and sadly. “Oh, Maude,” said she at last, “is

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there not something dreadful in the accusing eyes of the dead? They seem to threaten me with some dreadful punishment because I have transgressed against their laws and rendered myself an outcast. I have lost all that the world holds dear. Do you think that the man we saw this morning spoke truly, and that I am to be lonely until the end?"

"No, no," I cried; "you will be happy again—it makes me so miserable to know that you are sad." She held my hand tightly, and her pale face wore the fated expression of Marie Antoinette. It was certainly most eerie in this great palace with the soul-tormented woman haunted by the shadows of its lofty rooms, which drifted like rising mist along its echoing corridors. I was glad when we were outside in the sunlight, and the Princess, now completely herself, was showing me the beauties of the Boboli Gardens, and the curious pavilion where her father and his parents used to drink their morning coffee in the happy days previous to the flight of the old Grand Duke and his family from Florence.

Three days after our visit to the Pitti Palace I returned to England. Signor Toselli had most graciously dedicated the "*Chanson d'Avril*" to me, and I promised to try and "place" it for him in London. It was a cold, grey morning when I left Fiesole; the distant hills were hidden by the advancing armies of driving rain and sleet, and the wind seemed to be full of voices. The Princess and I drove down the hill-road almost in silence. At last she turned to me. "You will not forget me, Maude, will you? I know that you are a faithful creature, and I believe that you really love me."

"Yes," I answered, "because you will be always

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housed in a dream to me. You have awakened the spirit of chivalry within my heart, and I look upon you as a princess imprisoned in an enchanted castle." She laughed. "Oh, Maude, dear, there's always a dragon in an enchanted castle. Who is the dragon—Frederick August or poor Enrico?" I sighed. Her words had recalled me to earth.

The Princess bade me an affectionate farewell at the station, and I think she rather enjoyed the curiosity which her appearance excited on the platform. Some typical English tourists were waiting for the train, and the ladies eyed the notorious ex-Crown Princess with scandalised interest. Poor Princess! Poor woman! I always think that she must have proved a sad disappointment to those people who imagined her to be something akin to a stage adventuress. She looked so utterly unlike the heroine of many adventures.

"Good-bye, darling Maude; I shall see you soon in London. Good-bye," she said. And as the train began to move the Princess ran down the platform trying to keep pace with it, still staying "Good-bye—good-bye."

CHAPTER XXI

“ MY OWN STORY ”

I RETURNED to England triumphant. I had secured a sensational book, I had kept faith with Eveleigh Nash and Dr. Thomson, and I had made a romantic friendship with a persecuted princess. What more could I possibly desire? I therefore settled down to work with that slightly *exaltée* feeling which was, no doubt, due primarily to my rather sanguine temperament, combined with a dogged determination to write a really interesting book.

“ My Own Story ” was written in my little bedroom at Berkeley Cottage, where the telephone ceased from troubling and I could work undisturbed. I wrote this book at top speed, as I wanted to give the public an absolutely true picture of the Princess as I had known her whilst the impression of her personality was still fresh in my mind. I was quite happy in those days, as I was now in high favour in the capacity of a useful asset to the firm, and I had also won the legal action which had resulted from the tyrannical methods employed during the building operations next door.

This was my first experience of the Law Courts, and I was much interested in my own case. I shall never forget the kindness of Mr. Mark Romer, K.C., who represented me, and I thought that in appearance he was exactly like my idea of a flawless Sydney Carton. I was also amused at his ready wit in describing the

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little street where Berkeley Cottage is situated. “The street is called Jones Street, or perhaps it might be more appropriately described as Salisbury-Jones Street,” he said. Everyone laughed, as Salisbury-Jones was the name of the wealthy and important people who did not recognise my right to expect any compensation for the damage done to my pretty home.

The Princess was delighted at my success. “What a triumph for you to have won the law case,” she wrote. “I was quite happy! Imagine the rage of your enemies. Mr. Nash wrote to me, and seemed so proud and happy.” There was certainly every reason for me to be proud and happy, especially as the defendants were obliged to pay the costs of the action, which ran into well over a thousand pounds, whereas my original claim for compensation was, if I remember rightly, only a couple of hundred.

The ex-Crown Princess came to London in June. Eveleigh Nash read the completed book to her, and she expressed herself very pleased at the result of my work. The Princess was especially interested in the way I had described her temperament. “I can’t think how you *know* me,” she said.

During the summer of 1911 I made the acquaintance of the late Pierpont Morgan. The Princess had given me an old enamel pendant of St. George, and, as I knew that Mr. Morgan was a connoisseur of enamels, I wrote and asked him whether he would look at my pendant and tell me the exact period to which it belonged. To my great surprise he rang me up. “Are you 3637 Mayfair?” “Yes.” “Mrs. Ffoulkes speaking?” “Yes.” “Well, I’m Pierpont Morgan. Can you bring your pendant to Princes Gate this morning. I should very much like to see it.” I told

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Mr. Morgan that I would come within an hour, and on my arrival at Princes Gate I was shown into a room full of pictures, amongst them the famous "Miss Linley" which Mr. Morgan had recently acquired from the Sackville collection at Knole. What, however, struck me most in this beautiful room was the essentially homely touch of some inexpensive birdcages, tenanted by canaries who were singing away happily in the sunshine. The simple cages, which could only have cost a few shillings, were quite unlike what one expected to find in the house of a millionaire, and directly I saw Pierpont Morgan I decided that he was as unpretentious as his birdcages.

I remember that he was wearing a loose, rather shabby, black alpaca coat, the front of which showed traces of past meals, and his appearance suggested comfort and nothing else. He greeted me kindly, and appeared to be interested in the enamel, which he said was seventeenth-century Italian work. We chatted about the forthcoming book, and Mr. Morgan asked me to give him an autographed copy for his library in New York. He was so charming that I felt completely at ease. I told him about the impression which the cages had made on me. "Did you expect that I should have those dreadful gilt things?" said Mr. Morgan, laughing. "I noticed that you stared at me when I came in. Do you think that I don't come up to the accepted idea of a very rich man, and that I'm as cheap-looking as my birdcages? Tell me; I like candour."

"Very well," I answered, "that's exactly what I do think."

He was much amused, and he then asked me whether I would care to see some of the pictures in

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the adjoining room. I noticed that two Hoppners represented rather “large” women, and Mr. Morgan, looking critically from the pictures to me, observed: “I really think, Mrs. Ffoulkes, that you resemble the type of women who sat to Hoppner. Have you ever been told so before? I have a great collection of Hoppners; I really wish that you were another example of his work.”

“I’m afraid you can’t ‘collect’ me,” I said; “but I’m so glad that people were not all thin in those days, for I walk the earth like a mammoth in the midst of a crowd of midges. It’s dreadful.”

I promised to go and see Mr. Morgan on his return from America, but I never saw him again. He died some months afterwards, and I have always regretted that circumstances did not permit me to become better acquainted with the simple-minded, pleasant man.

“My Own Story” was published in September, 1911, and it was a great sensational success. The newspapers were full of it, the front-door bell at Berkeley Cottage never ceased ringing, we were besieged by reporters, everybody connected with the book was photographed and interviewed, and Eveleigh Nash came forward in the character of the *entrepreneur* who had so admirably exploited the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony, but Mr. Le Queux was rather forgotten in his rôle of the jackal who had hunted for the lion.

We had a celebration dinner at the Berkeley on the day of publication, and my old acquaintance, M. Giordano (better known as the genial “Arturo”), and his colleague, M. Ferraro, surpassed themselves in the arrangements. I always think of the Berkeley

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in connection with my long friendship with Eveleigh Nash, as we held high festival there whenever a book of Recollections appeared.

The Princess elected to go to the Empire after dinner, as she wished to see the ballet of "Sylvia." "I have not seen it since I was in Dresden," she said. "I remember that I asked the principal danseuse to come to the Royal box, and I teased King George of Saxony most unmercifully about her. 'The King greatly admires your legs,' I whispered to the danseuse, and I took good care that my words were overheard by my horrified father-in-law."

Lady Cardigan rather disapproved of the ex-Crown Princess, whom she regarded in the light of a very foolish, irresponsible person. "But she is so absolutely charming," I said. "My dear, always distrust a Habsburg," was the uncompromising rejoinder. At this time I used often to go to Deanery Street, as my friendship with Lady Cardigan had not suffered by reason of the many unpleasantnesses connected with her much-discussed book.

One afternoon, Knighton, the butler, rang up, and asked me to come and see Lady Cardigan as soon as possible. "What's the matter?" I asked. "Is her ladyship ill?" "No," replied the voice of Knighton, "her ladyship is *not* ill, but she has seen a ghost." I found Lady Cardigan all excitement, and she hardly even waited until we were alone before she announced: "That hateful woman has come back to annoy me." "Which hateful woman?" I asked, as there were many to whom the adjective might most suitably be applied.

"You know whom I mean," she said crossly; "it's Louise, Duchess of Devonshire. She always detested

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me when she was alive, and now she has come back to haunt me in the shape of a bat.”

“A bat? You’re dreaming.”

“Nothing of the kind,” she snapped. “I assure you, dear Mrs. Ffoulkes, that a bat was flopping and flapping about my room during the night; it was the Duchess. I do wish she’d let me alone.”

Nothing would convince Lady Cardigan that the bat must have existed solely in her imagination, and she firmly believed that her former enemy had chosen to disturb her slumbers in this uncalled-for way.

The ex-Crown Princess went to Switzerland in the autumn of 1911, and I am convinced that if she had only exercised a little patience things would have gone better with her. The King of Saxony was touched by the manner in which he had been depicted in “My Own Story,” and there was every chance of a *rap-prochement* between him and his wife. Frederick August even went to Genoa incognito, hoping that the Princess would meet him there and discuss amicable plans for the future. But unfortunately Louisa was now on the verge of what is best described as a Habsburg *crise des nerfs*, which first manifested itself in the mad escapade of a journey to Florence, presumably to fetch her jewels, though in reality, I believe, she was driven thither by some nostalgia to revisit Fiesole and the Villa Paganucci.

Signor Toselli was almost the first person whom the Princess encountered on her return to Florence, and what really transpired between them will never be known. The Princess swore to me that her husband forced himself upon her, and lured her back to Fiesole solely to regain possession of Bubi, who had been with his mother ever since she left Italy. Signor Toselli’s

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account of the episode is very different; but, as everyone has a right to their opinion, I prefer to accept the Princess's version. The unfortunate and indisputable fact remained, however, that, whilst the King of Saxony was waiting impatiently at Genoa, the Princess and Signor Toselli were reunited at Fiesole.

The newspapers seized upon this unexpected development, more especially as the disputes between the Princess and Signor Toselli had of late been so acrimonious that nobody imagined they could possibly live together again.

I could hardly believe my eyes when I first read the paragraphs which announced that a reconciliation had taken place between the estranged pair, and I felt a sickening sense of disappointment that all hope of the Princess's return to Saxony was now at an end; monarchs are every bit as vain as the majority of men, and it was not to be supposed that the King of Saxony would ever forgive Louisa's excessively off-hand treatment. At last I could bear the suspense no longer, and on October 29th I telegraphed to the Princess, imploring her to deny the reports of a reconciliation. She replied at once. "Meet me at Charing Cross Station on the evening of the 31st. Reports incorrect."

I waited at Charing Cross, all anxiety; the boat-train was very late, and it was cold and foggy, depressing beyond words, the night of Hallowe'en, when the dead are permitted to revisit the homes where they once dwelt. I shivered as the evil, yellow fog drifted across the draughty platform, and it made me think of the fearsome mist which the Vampire Count Dracula called up when he wished to evade his pursuers. The train was over an hour late; it was a melancholy return to England for the Princess, and I

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remembered her hopeful words of only a few weeks ago. “I will be very quiet and patient, dear Maude,” she had said, “for something tells me that I shall soon be in Dresden once more.”

She was now about as far from Dresden as earth is from heaven; the mad impulse of a moment had wrecked everything, and I remembered the doom pronounced upon her by the Florentine soothsayer: “Alone to the end.” Alas! The Princess was indeed alone, and it was difficult to imagine in what way I could be of service to her, as something instinctively told me that she now required my help.

At last the express steamed into the station, and I peered anxiously through the fog in a vain endeavour to find her. “It is you, Maude,” said a voice. I turned, and the next moment the Princess was in my arms. She was unaccompanied by her maid, and a cursory glance showed me how ill she seemed. We drove to the Stafford Hotel, where I had engaged a little suite: she was ashen white, and gave me the impression of having passed through fires which had seared her soul.

I comforted her as best I could; her pretty, weary head rested on my shoulder, and I wiped away her tears and kissed her many times. All that was noblest in me was appealed to by this terrible agony of suffering. I knew that the Princess wept tears of blood, the weird of the Habsburgs was indeed heavy on this night of the gathering of souls, and for an instant I almost wished that my unhappy friend was dead and at rest for evermore.

Gradually I learnt what had passed between her and Signor Toselli; she had made an irrevocable *faux pas*, but I could not tell the Princess that, so far as

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Frederick August was concerned, all was lost. "Maude, Maude!" she cried wildly, "you must help me, you must vindicate me, you must defend me. You are my last hope. Swear to me that you will not fail me."

"I will *never* fail you," I said.

"Well, write a vindication which will be read everywhere. I cannot bear to think that Frederick August misjudges me so cruelly. I insist that he shall know the truth."

It was not the moment for reproaches; I stayed with the Princess until she was calmer, and then I returned to Berkeley Cottage. The situation was most distressing, and I gloomily reflected that the process of whitewashing this last escapade would prove very difficult. I wondered who on earth would publish my defence of the Princess, and it occurred to me that, as *Le Matin* had secured "My Own Story," they might be induced to publish this dramatic sequel.

I knew where to find M. Christian Sauerwein, the London representative of the paper, so without even waiting to remove my hat I ran to the telephone, and gave him a brief résumé of the Princess's latest adventure. He was all excitement, and he told me that he would get through on the private line to Paris, and lay my proposition before those in authority at *Le Matin*. "I will lose no time in telling you what is decided," he said; "for my own part I think it is good copy."

Le Matin at once agreed to publish the vindication, and M. Sauerwein told me so before I saw the Princess the next morning. She was much more composed than on the previous evening, but I am sure that she now fully realised the extent of her deplorable folly.

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She gave me instructions as to what she wished me to say in *Le Matin*, but she refused to remain a day longer in London, and she went off to Paris by the afternoon train. “I shall stay in Paris under the name of the Comtesse d’Ysette,” she told me. This curious title, which the Princess often used, represented a play upon the words *dix sept*, as she believed implicitly that the number seventeen had always played, and was still destined to play, a very important part in her life.

I duly wrote “*Les dernières Aventures de Louise de Saxe*”; they appeared as a feuilleton in *Le Matin* for a fortnight. *Le Journal*, not to be outdone by the rival newspaper, at once sent an emissary to Florence, where Signor Toselli was indulging in a fine frenzy of wrath, and he joyously accepted *Le Journal’s* invitation to write his unfortunate experiences as the husband of the ex-Crown Princess.

There really seemed to be no end to the worry consequent on the disastrous *crise des nerfs* which had taken the Princess to Italy. One morning I received a writ for libel issued on behalf of Signor Toselli against me and *Le Matin*; and later I saw M. Christian and M. Charles Sauerwein, who informed me that in due course I should receive various other writs, citing me to appear as co-defendant with *Le Matin* in all the countries where the paper was circulated.

“Good gracious!” said I, aghast. “Why, I shall become a sort of Wandering Jew; I shall really require a Cook’s circular ticket if I’m to go all over Europe to prove the truth of what I said.”

“You will, of course, stand by us?” asked Charles Sauerwein.

“But naturally I will,” I answered. “Do you

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think for one moment that I am a coward? I'm not in the least afraid of Signor Toselli. I love a fight, and this one is rather exciting."

The Princess was now in Brussels, and her letters to me were full of trouble. Her allowance from Saxony had been suddenly withdrawn, she was miserable, her life was over, nothing remained. Perhaps, after all, it would have been better never to have written "My Own Story." The King of Saxony was furious, Enrico was behaving like a madman, her dear Maude was about to be dragged before all the *tribunaux* in Europe. What would be the end of it all? "Goodness only knows," said I, when I read this distressing letter. "I only hope I shan't have a breakdown as a final tableau."

I was not, however, going to stand by and see the Princess deprived of her money in this cold-blooded way, and I therefore decided to make a personal appeal to the German Embassy. I accordingly asked for an interview touching the urgent private affairs of Her Imperial Highness the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony, and I received a letter from Baron von Kuhlmann, asking me to come and see him at Carlton House Terrace.

I was not at all prepossessed in favour of Baron von Kuhlmann; I thought that he was rather coarse and decidedly blustering, but when he discovered that I was not impressed he became more courteous.

"Why do you concern yourself over the troubles of the Crown Princess?" he asked.

"Because she is unhappy, and because I have the honour to call her my friend," I answered.

"But you are aware that she has caused her family a great deal of pain?" said von Kuhlmann gravely.

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“His Majesty the King of Saxony has every reason to be displeased with the Princess.”

“Oh, as for that!” I cried, “I think the King is a horribly weak person; he has only himself to blame for much that has occurred. After all, the Princess is the mother of his children—they’re hers as well as his—and he has no right to take away her income in this wicked manner. He’s despicable!”

“Madame, pray be silent. You are speaking disrespectfully of His Majesty.”

“Oh! I don’t care if I am; it’s wicked! How would *your* wife like to be turned adrift without a penny? However,” I continued, “if anything dreadful happens to the Princess, I shall not hesitate a moment. I have many of her letters, and I shall publish them, and let all the world know the cruelty with which she has been treated.”

“You really intend to do this?” said von Kuhlmann.

“Absolutely,” I answered.

He sat for some moments deep in thought. “Well, madame, I will have your remarks conveyed to the King of Saxony; he may alter his decision when the matter is again placed before him. You appear to be really devoted to the Princess; we understand your friendship for her. Would you, if the occasion presented itself, care to consider the question of living with her in a castle in Austria?”

“Is a castle synonymous with a private asylum?” I asked. “Everyone knows that there are many secluded castles which are extremely useful as *oubliettes* for refractory members of the House of Habsburg.”

The Baron smiled. “I mentioned a *castle*, madame, not an *oubliette*.”

My Own Past

"Thanks very much," said I, "but, as I'm not over anxious to secure an option on either, I fear I must decline your flattering proposal."

I spent Christmas in Brussels with the ex-Crown Princess, who was staying at the Hotel Astoria whilst her new house in the Avenue des Klauwaerts was being made ready for occupation. I arrived in Brussels late on Christmas Day; the Princess met me at the station, but I was painfully impressed by the change both in her manner and her appearance. She was harder, more cynical, more fateful than on that unhappy evening when I had last seen her; she was reckless and defiant, and I trembled for the future.

I devoutly hoped that the Princess was secure from any evil influences in Brussels, and I did not hesitate to tell her so. "My dear Maude," she said bitterly, "if I were in heaven, I believe that I should be credited with having a dozen lovers. Of what avail is it to struggle? I am weary of it all."

"That is not like my courageous Princess," I said; "think how happy you will be when 'Tia' is his own master. I am sure that he will take care of you for the rest of your life."

"Perhaps," she sighed. "But even 'Tia' may forget."

Directly we arrived at the Hotel Astoria the Princess asked me to come upstairs with her. "I've something to show you," she said, as we went down the corridor which led to her bedroom. "Look, Maude," she cried, opening the door and switching on the electric light, "*this* is a memory of Dresden!"

I saw a round table covered with a white cloth, and on it was a solitary Christmas tree. It was hung with festoons of silver, tiny candles and gay toys decked its

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branches, and a little wax angel, with golden wings, smiled serenely from the topmost bough. But an air of indescribable loneliness enveloped the tree and its glittering toys, symbolic, I thought, of the lonely heart of the pale woman who stood beside me.

“Maude,” she whispered, “this makes me think of Christmas Eve at Dresden. It was so happy . . . the dear children . . . everyone blessing the Holy Night of the Christ Child’s birth. Sometimes I am sure that my thoughts will kill me. Why, oh why, must I suffer?”

I did not reply, for words could convey no comfort to this broken spirit. As I looked at the melancholy tree I saw in imagination the soft glow of many candles on another Christmas tree in a palace far away. Handsome youths and pretty little girls, who called the King of Saxony their father, were standing round it, laughing and talking together. Frederick August alone remembered the days that were past, for he was preoccupied and sad. But the dream-picture faded, and I was again in the cold bedroom at the Hotel Astoria, with the desolate mother and the pathetic Christmas tree.

I was very apprehensive about the marked change which had come over the Princess, and I asked her maid whether she had been over-fatigued or over-excited since her return to Brussels. “Her Imperial Highness never rests,” said Lisa. “I, too, madame, am very troubled about her; she cannot sleep, and she often rises before dawn and walks alone for hours in the Bois de la Cambre. I am sure that her Imperial Highness will end by becoming seriously ill.”

We spent a very quiet Christmas Day. I went to High Mass at St. Gudule, and in the afternoon we went for a walk in the town. I had not revisited

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Brussels since my schooldays, and as we passed down the Montagne de la Cour I remembered my first visit to the city when I was a girl of eighteen. The street was unchanged; the shops where I had seen the photographs of Mary Vetsera were still in existence. Nothing had apparently altered except myself. I had escaped from my cage; but had I found rest or any lasting happiness outside its bars? I sighed, and I glanced at that other rebellious spirit who, like myself, had fretted in captivity. What would be her end, and what would eventually be my own? "May the fates give us a long period of rest!" I piously ejaculated.

"We must positively go to the theatre to-night," said the Princess, as we wended our way back to the Astoria; "an evening in the hotel would bore me to tears. Let us go and see *L'Aimé des Femmes*; it's rather *risqué*, I believe. We won't have a box, we will sit with the *petite bourgeoisie*; it's far more amusing. I love mixing with the people."

"But can you do so without running the risk of exciting a great deal of comment?"

"My dear," she laughed, "history repeats itself. My ancestress, Maria Theresa, liked nothing better than to sit in the Burg Theatre and converse familiarly with the audience. One night the Empress appeared in the Royal Box, her hair in curlpapers, with a cloak thrown carelessly over her shoulders; she had received the news of the birth of a grandchild just as she was preparing for bed, but her thoughts instantly flew to her beloved Viennese. 'I must go to the Burg and tell the people,' she cried; and, regardless of her quaint *déshabillé*, she drove to the theatre, and in person announced the important event."

The Princess appeared to enjoy the little Théâtre

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des Galeries, and I remember that she left her hat most unceremoniously in the stuffy cloakroom, where a varied collection of ticketed headgear had been deposited until the end of the performance. Directly we took our seats all eyes were fixed upon her. “*Tiens, voilà Louise de Saxe!*” exclaimed several voices, and I was very much annoyed at the whispered remarks which my companion pretended not to hear. “Why *will* the Princess persist in cheapening herself?” I queried. “Why does she not play her part with more dignity?” But my momentary anger vanished when once we were outside the theatre. “You are cross, Maude,” she said affectionately. “Don’t be vexed. I hate the conventions of life.” “I’m not cross,” I answered, “but it is such a pity that you will not realise that you are surrounded by most unscrupulous enemies whose one aim is to make a mountain out of the tiniest molehill of an indiscretion.”

“*Tant pis!*” replied Louisa, with an air of the utmost indifference.

CHAPTER XXII

THE COUNTESS LARISCH

WHEN I returned to London I found every prospect of the Toselli writs falling thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. The Princess did not concern herself greatly over the threatened lawsuits, as I think she had become indifferent to most things except her own troubles. "My heart is sore, and I feel craziness slowly creeping over me," she wrote from Brussels. "I do not mind; my life has been long enough. Do not pity me."

In the meantime Signor Toselli's reminiscences of the "real" (?) Louisa were in active preparation, and his collaborator, M. Henri de Noussanne, came to London, presumably on business and incidentally to see me. We had a heated interview at the Cecil, when M. de Noussanne endeavoured to awaken within me a feeling of sorrow for having so abused the charming Enrico Toselli in "*Les dernières Aventures de Louise de Saxe.*" "*C'est un si charmant garçon,*" he said reproachfully, "and you, madame, are the catspaw of a wicked woman whose duplicity you apparently do not realise." He asked me whether I knew that I was already the object of scorn and derision as the dupe of an utterly unscrupulous woman, who, not content with deceiving the King of Saxony, had broken the noble heart of Enrico Toselli.

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"This law business will be costly, madame. You will be ruined!" said de Noussanne in an awful voice.

"Perhaps," I answered, utterly unmoved.

"Your family will have to pay a great deal of money to Signor Toselli if he is successful."

"I do not think you know my family, monsieur; they do not encourage the luxury of law."

"Your husband, then, madame, will be liable."

"Oh, you know still less about my husband; he does not hold himself responsible for my indiscretions," I said, laughing.

"You will be imprisoned in Holloway Gaol," retorted the courteous gentleman.

"Oh, I assure you it's quite fashionable since the Suffragettes have patronised it. But now, M. de Noussanne, will you tell me what is your motive for prolonging this conversation? You've tried to alarm me, and you've not succeeded. Is there anything else?"

M. de Noussanne then changed his tactics, and became suave, fatherly and protecting. He told me very gravely that my affection for the Princess was entirely misplaced. All the trouble could easily be prevented if I would acknowledge that I had been deceived by the Princess, and that I was now aware that her statements concerning Signor Toselli were false.

"This acknowledgment will, of course, be published?" I asked.

"Yes," he assented. "The honour of Signor Toselli will then be completely satisfied."

"Briefly, I am offered immunity from worry if I consent to betray my friend. Never! I absolutely decline to entertain such a proposal," I said, half beside myself with rage.

"You are a fool," declared M. de Noussanne.

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“I may be,” I retorted, “but, anyhow, I believe in the truth of the saying, ‘*C’est mieux d’être trahi, que de trahir.*’”

M. de Noussanne and I corresponded at some length after this interview, and I sent his letters to the Princess, who professed herself amused by them.

The ex-Crown Princess went to Italy in January, as she had instituted proceedings to demand the restitution of Bubi, who was living under the watchful care of his grandparents in Florence. All kinds of wild reports were circulated about her, and on February 20th she wrote: “Do you know, darling, according to the Italian papers, I am engaged to an Italian officer—the wedding is fixed for April 1st! You see, I have quite a collection of husbands, of all sorts, ages, and social positions. I have bought a villa in Florence, a house in Berlin; perhaps, next, an aeroplane for my wedding trip.

“The world will never leave me alone. I am accustomed to it, it will never change, and it leaves me perfectly indifferent.”

In February I took the typescript of Madame Steinheil’s much discussed book to Paris, as *Le Matin* had asked Eveleigh Nash to give them the first refusal of the French rights. Charles Sauerwein had already seen Mr. Nash, and begged him to eliminate certain personalities respecting himself in the English edition of the book, and I secretly wondered why the strong-minded, clever man was so morbidly sensitive over Madame Steinheil’s acidulated remarks. When I saw him in Paris I was still more surprised at his openly expressed fear and hatred of her, but I supposed that wounded vanity alone was accountable for Charles Sauerwein’s extraordinary attitude.

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It is useless to disguise the fact that I was considerably worried over the pending lawsuits, more especially as, for some unknown reason, the ex-Crown Princess decided that it would be beneath her dignity to appear as a witness for *Le Matin*. I suppose the friend of the moment dissuaded her, and I was relieved when the action suddenly collapsed, and I was told that matters had been settled between Signor Toselli and *Le Matin*. This left me free to write Lord Rossmore's Recollections with a mind untroubled by legal cares, and in April, 1912, I went over to Ireland to take the notes for the book.

I already knew Lord Rossmore slightly, as we had met before he went to South Africa in the previous December, and I felt sure that his personality and his fund of racy anecdote would result in my obtaining a book something akin to "My Recollections." But Lord Rossmore was quite out of sympathy with me, and, although I have not the slightest doubt that "Darry" is a very popular person, I couldn't get on with him at all. "We're like oil and water," I said desperately one day, when he had found "recollecting" more painful than usual; "we don't mix!" Rossmore Park was a beautiful place, and I stayed at Camla House with Lord Rossmore's agent and his wife, who did everything in their power to make matters go smoothly between my sitter and myself. But at times I felt inclined to throw up my work and return home, so difficult was "Darry," although, when he chose, nobody could be nicer or more amusing.

"Things I can Tell" was published in the autumn of 1912, and it inspired "Max's" amusing caricature of "A Nobleman dictating his Past"—I think this is the right title. The lady was not in the least like me, and

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"Max" was rather amused the other day when I was introduced to him as the "real" memoir writer.

Lord Rossmore's book, luckily, was well received, and it was also a very successful "seller." I was beginning to think that I had discovered a corner in "Recollections," for no sooner had I written "Things I can Tell" than I had the opportunity of securing another literary sensation. I did not, however, suffer from "swelled head" over this run of luck. I now merely looked upon my work from the journalistic point of view, as Eveleigh Nash candidly told me that any capable journalist could have written the books equally as well as myself. I don't doubt the accuracy of his judgment, but I think I may be allowed to say that it required a neurotic temperament like my own to understand the highly-strung people with whom I so successfully collaborated. However, as the "Memoirs" sold well, I was glad to think I had been useful, even in a journalistic capacity.

One day Eveleigh Nash asked me whether I would care to write the true story of the events which had resulted in the tragic death of the Crown Prince Rudolph at Meyerling. My friend had been approached by a gentleman living at Metz who was authorised to offer him a book to be written from material supplied by the Countess Marie Larisch, the favourite niece of the late Empress Elizabeth.

I was naturally in favour of the proposal, as the sombre history of the Habsburgs had always fascinated me, and I knew that the secret history of the Austrian Court would most assuredly prove of absorbing interest. "Besides," said I, "I remember that the news of the tragedy of Meyerling was almost the first thing I heard when I arrived in Brussels years ago. It is an odd



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coincidence that I should be asked to write about it now."

Eveleigh Nash wrote to Metz, expressing himself willing to consider the proposition, and it was eventually arranged that I should meet Countess Larisch in Paris. I lost no time in leaving London, and when I arrived at my destination I found a note from the Countess informing me that she would be glad to see me at the Grand Hotel on the following morning. The little that I had heard about my new "sitter" made me slightly apprehensive, as report said that she was a hard and peculiar tempered woman, who had played a sinister part in the mysterious drama of Meyerling.

I waited for quite half an hour in the hall of the Grand Hotel, and I was just beginning to wonder whether my card really had been sent up to the Countess, when I suddenly noticed a tall, imposing woman, dressed in black, who had just come down in the lift. Our eyes met. "Are you Mrs. Ffoulkes?" said the stranger in excellent English, and, upon receiving my reply in the affirmative, she asked me to come to the reading-room, "where we can talk undisturbed."

Countess Marie Larisch was one of the "largest" women I have ever seen—and I should imagine that she had once been beautiful; but she possessed none of the romantic sweetness of the ex-Crown Princess, which inspired sympathy and affection almost as soon as she spoke. This woman was the embodiment of some dreadful tragedy, and a lost soul looked out of the lovely, reckless eyes which were the most striking features in her face. Heavy coils of golden hair glistened under her much be-feathered hat, and her

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furs were fastened with a wonderful diamond brooch, which displayed her cypher surmounted by the Imperial Crown of Austria.

She was gracious, but her manner was haughty, and she was at first disinclined to let me take away the manuscript which she had brought with her. "It should be accepted upon my assurance that it is something extraordinary in the nature of a sensation," she said. "Why cannot you settle the matter at once?"

"Because, Countess, I have my instructions that I must see what you have to offer, and then decide whether it is worth the price you are asking. It is unreasonable to expect us to buy anything in the dark."

"How am I to know that my precious manuscript will be safe with you?" she asked.

"I'm afraid you must take my word for it," I answered, none too well pleased at her uncompromising attitude. There was, nevertheless, something curiously attractive about Countess Marie Larisch, and she gave me the impression that there was a softer side to her nature if once it were possible to take her in the right way.

"I would like to be very frank with you, Countess," I said, resolved to dare everything. "What is your motive for wishing to disclose the secret of Meyerling: are you actuated by the love of notoriety, or a desire to make a large sum of money? I know a little of your history, and I feel it is only right to warn you that these sensational books are bound to cause trouble. It's against Mr. Nash's interests to dissuade you, but I don't want to have it on my conscience that I have not urged you to think well over what you propose doing."

A dull flush slowly suffused the cold, disdainful face

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of Marie Larisch, and her tragic eyes glowed strangely.

"You ask me, madame," she said, "why I choose to reveal the secret of Meyerling. I will tell you. It is quite simple. Firstly, I want to relate what actually happened, and, secondly, *je veux me venger*."

"But why do you wish for revenge?" I asked. "The Empress is dead; your hatred cannot touch her. I am aware that she made you suffer, but is it worth while to recall the past?"

"Elizabeth is dead," she answered in a hard and cruel voice, "but one exists who has helped to make my life a hell. It is the Emperor Francis Joseph upon whom I will be revenged; and if you, madame, decline to write my book, someone else must be found. My purpose is inflexible."

I was suddenly seized with an hysterical desire to laugh. The whole of Francis Joseph's family, and most of his relations by marriage, seemed to be at war with him. Here was someone else who had incurred his displeasure and had been promptly outlawed by the aged autocrat. "I wish 'Max' would do a caricature of the Emperor banishing his relations," I reflected; and I had an irreverent mental picture of the Habsburgs and the Wittelbachs attacking Francis Joseph like a cloud of angry gnats.

"Well, may I read the manuscript at my hotel?" I asked. "Please don't be so suspicious; it makes me feel so horribly bad-tempered." Countess Larisch smiled for the first time during our interview. "I will trust you," she said simply; and she handed me a roll of closely-written manuscript tied with violet ribbon, which I promised to return with the utmost possible dispatch.

I drove to the offices of *Le Matin* directly I left

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the Grand Hotel, and I told Charles Sauerwein what had brought me to Paris. "Will your people consider purchasing the French rights of the drama of Meyerling?" I asked. "The Countess wants a big price, and I should like to be able to tell Mr. Nash that there was some prospect of selling the book in France."

"You can bring me the completed manuscript," said Charles Sauerwein. "I can't give you a definite answer until we have seen it. Of course you are going to write the book?"

"Naturally," I said. "But, M. Charles, you seem displeased; you are not a bit cordial. What is the matter?"

"I have read the Steinheil memoirs," he replied, "and I think that my personal feelings have not been sufficiently considered. That is enough. I do not forgive easily, Mrs. Ffoulkes."

"If I were Charles Sauerwein," I cried, "I would not trouble what any woman chose to say about me. You are too 'big' a man to let such trifles disturb you." He smiled at this rather blatant flattery, but I really meant what I said. Charles Sauerwein possessed a tremendous personality, he was intensely ambitious and wonderfully gifted, and his premature death cut short the certainty of a most brilliant future.

I read the manuscript, and I duly returned it to Countess Larisch. The story which she narrated was absolutely enthralling, but far too short in itself to make a book. I wondered if it would be possible to persuade her to give me her recollections of the Empress Elizabeth, and thus to record an unknown fragment of mysterious history which would culminate in the tragedy of Meyerling. I laid this proposal before Eveleigh Nash on my return, and he wrote to

The Countess Larisch

the Countess, giving her my opinion of what it was possible to do with her material. There was endless correspondence, and at one time I really thought that negotiations were at an end. However, everything was at last settled, and I arranged to go to Metz at Christmas and take the notes for the book.

Although Signor Toselli's great libel action had been amicably disposed of, his reminiscences of his unhappy wife were appearing in *Le Journal*, and thousands of people greedily devoured his accounts of Louisa, "day by day." I had been told that he proposed to describe me in the most unflattering terms, but I did not expect him to do otherwise, and I troubled myself not at all. As Gerald Duckworth, the publisher, had most courteously offered to eliminate the home truths concerning Mrs. Ffoulkes from the English edition, Eveleigh Nash imagined that now all was well, and what the eye sees not, the heart rues not. But I was destined to have the mirror of truth held up to me by a really "nice" woman, who most thoughtfully put the copy of *Le Journal* which dealt with my unfortunate appearance in the letter-box at the "Cottage."

Italians are always gentlemen, so I am quite certain that Signor Toselli shielded me somewhat from the awful reality of my personal imperfections. But when I read myself described as a fat, ugly woman, whose appearance would apparently raise a hearty laugh at a funeral, I must acknowledge that I shuddered. I now realised how tolerant my friends had been: I must have grated on their artistic susceptibilities like a squeaky slate pencil.

I went to Metz by way of Paris, as I wanted to see Mademoiselle Sauerwein and an English girl-friend

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of mine who was nursing a case there. On December 31st I left for Metz, and the long and tiring journey was made uninteresting by the incessant rain. It was nearly eight o'clock when I arrived, and I took a violent dislike to the place directly I found myself in the great official-looking railway station. The porters were most uncivil, and it would not have surprised me if all the employees had suddenly commenced to do the goose-step, so martial was their demeanour in 1913. I had engaged a room at the Hotel de l'Europe, which, I believe, was occupied by the Emperor William I. when he stayed at Metz during the Franco-Prussian War. It is a large building, standing well back from the street in an open courtyard, through which visitors are driven with great *éclat* before they are put down at the entrance to the hotel.

I went into a long dining-room, heavy with the fumes of beer and baked meats, and crowded with officers of all shapes and sizes—mostly out-sizes! I heard the word *Engländerin* several times, and I sat down at a table and watched the diners with no small degree of interest. The majority of the women present were as ugly as Signor Toselli's appreciation of me, and the civilians were entirely uninteresting. The officers talked loudly and incessantly, and the waiters ran about like whipped dogs. It was not a scene to stimulate either the imagination or the appetite, as some of the officers ate noisily and greedily, and they expectorated freely in utter disregard for the accepted uses of spittoons.

Countess Larisch was unable to see me until the afternoon of New Year's Day, so the hall porter suggested that I should take advantage of the fine

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frosty morning and make a tour of inspection of the battlefields near Metz. I therefore hired a car, and I was soon in the open country, a region of vast wind-swept spaces and occasional melancholy woods, the whole area one enormous graveyard where the brave sleep undisturbed. I shall not easily forget my feelings when I saw the advance guards of that silent army; the little crosses scattered here and there had a curious effect of unreality, and I had to look twice before I was really sure what they actually represented.

They occurred in the most unlikely places. As the car passed through a village I noticed a soldier's grave at the threshold of a cottage door, another was near the pump in a yard, and gradually these pathetic memorials increased in number until the fields were strewn with crosses, and large ornate monuments in memory of fallen officers were also noticeable at various points on the road.

I remember that the nearness of Death to Nature struck me most forcibly, for the kindly earth had gathered the fallen to her bosom, and they rested in her tender arms far away from the turmoil of cities and those ambitions which demand the spilling of innocent blood. The silence which pervaded these lonely fields—God's acres in the truest sense of the word—was unbroken except for the trilling of a robin perched on a wooden cross and a little sighing snow-wind that came from the hills. In the distance lay Metz, a city of brooding melancholy, a captive weeping for her lost sons and for her lost freedom. As I looked about me, a detachment of cavalry passed, the first sign of life that I had seen in these quiet roads, and I wondered if the French dead heard the sound of the horses' hoofs, and stirred in their resting-places because they

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knew that those who passed were descendants of their ancient and undying enemy.

I was not sorry to find myself again in the busy streets. A wave of indescribable sadness overwhelmed me when I thought of the fields where, for the first time, I had realised the aftermath of war. I became aware of a curious feeling of unrest which seemed to pervade Metz, a certain unseen activity as of invisible workers in some gigantic hive. Everyone seemed inwardly expectant—but of *what*? for the expressionless faces betrayed nothing. It was, nevertheless, a force which could be felt, and I knew it to be one that was striving for the attainment of some secret end, an ominous feeling was in the very air!

After *déjeuner* I drove to the St. Marcellenstrasse, where Countess Larisch resided. “What a dreary town to live in!” I reflected, as I looked at the tall, unfriendly buildings and the monotonous drabness of the streets. “No wonder that the Countess looks so tragic; it would be very difficult to escape from this cage.” I walked up the paved approach to her house, which had the forlorn appearance of having once seen better days, and a young manservant admitted me into a small inner hall which looked exactly like a *chapelle ardente*.

The walls were hung with wreaths of all sizes and varieties, tied with streamers of many-coloured ribbons. There were dusty laurels, shrivelled palm branches, china and bead flowers, dyed immortelles, and brown and faded trophies which had once been real blossoms. I could not help thinking that I had apparently come to a very odd house, as I followed the servant through a dining-room, which loudly proclaimed the smell of sausage and cigars, into a large, dark apartment hung

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with many pictures. I sat down and looked curiously around me. The wall-paper was red, inartistic in design, and faded in places, and two pictures hung on the wall nearest the door, one of which I knew to be Elizabeth of Austria. But this Elizabeth had the unshadowed eyes of a girl, the fearless happiness of youth undimmed by sorrow. I thought I had rarely seen a more beautiful face, and I admired the simple white lace dress with the knot of purple clematis at the *décolletage*. The other portrait was that of her sister, the Queen of Naples, a woman almost as beautiful as the Empress; she, too, wore a simple white gown, and a string of corals encircled her throat.

Facing me was the full-length portrait of a girl in bridal white, holding a spray of myrtle, and this I recognised as Countess Larisch. She did not look happy, like Elizabeth of Austria; her expression was sullen, she seemed to know the world better than most young girls, and there was a cynical look of disillusionment in the gravely handsome face.

I am convinced that certain houses absorb the personalities of their occupants, and this was one of them. Tragedy and misfortune lurked in every corner of the room; the heavy curtains seemed as if they were hiding something dreadful behind their folds, the atmosphere was oppressive, the silence sinister. There were many rosaries and crucifixes lying on the mantelpiece in a confused heap; the grand piano was littered with untidy music, dust was everywhere, and a magnificent sealskin wrap was thrown half over a chair and half on the floor. I remembered the life which Countess Larisch had led in Vienna when she was in the zenith of her splendour, and I wondered more and more at the strange house hidden away in this beleaguered city.

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The Countess welcomed me kindly, and said she was sorry to have been prevented from seeing me in the morning. I told her where I had been, and she shrugged her shoulders. "You like sad things? Well, if so, you will like Metz; it is the dullest, saddest place in the world. I *hate* it," she added, "but here I must stay, as my husband has to manage the theatre. Oh, for an hour of Vienna once again!"

As I talked to my new acquaintance I became aware that the sullen look of the young girl was intensified in the face of the woman. The Countess gave me the idea of having always existed in a state of impotent and angry revolt against Fate, a smouldering hatred of the life which she was forced to lead, and an intense and dreadful weariness of soul. At times she wore an expression of frozen horror akin to the look seen on the faces of those who have beheld the head of Medusa; she rarely smiled, and her laugh, when she discussed the past, was almost savage.

"Now, Madame Maude," she said " (I must call you this; it's impossible to remember the other name), we are going to work together. Eh! and we will write a book which will annoy that stupid old man in Vienna. But, how do I know if I can trust you? I do not like women—they have always injured me. You look a 'sensitive'; that is not lucky for you; the women who succeed in life have no emotions."

"It's no use being suspicious of me," I said; "if I'm to write a good book, you must help me by being perfectly frank. The ex-Crown Princess of Saxony was candour itself; she and I loved each other dearly."

"Louisa is a fool," replied the Countess; "but most of the Habsburgs are born fools or else idiots. That woman made a laughing-stock of herself. We

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Wittelbachs," continued this extraordinary member of the Royal House of Bavaria, "are guilty of many foolish actions, but, unlike the Habsburgs, we do not shout our follies from the housetops. Therein lies the difference between our eccentricities."

"But you yourself, Countess, became tired of the great world. Is it not true that your present husband, Herr Brück, was once an opera singer?" I said, anxious to excuse the Princess's social lapse in her marriage with Signor Toselli.

"That is true," she replied, with the faintest flicker of a smile; "but do not forget, Madame Maude, that I and my folly are practically buried alive in Metz."

We commenced work on the following morning, and when I arrived at the Marcellenstrasse the manservant took me at once to the room of pictures, and then fetched a round table, covered with a blood-red satin cloth, saying as he did so, "For madame's papers." Countess Larisch followed in his wake. She wore a serge skirt, and an ugly flannel dressing-jacket which was most incongruously fastened with the great diamond brooch which I had previously admired in Paris. In her hand she carried a riding-whip with a jewelled handle, and I wondered for what its present use was intended. "I am ready," she said, addressing the servant, who promptly went out of the room, and then returned wheeling in a low arm-chair. At this moment a huge, evil-looking dog walked solemnly up to the Countess and regarded me with icy indifference. "This is Bosko, my best friend," said she; "he is my protector, but he is a savage creature, so do not touch him, Madame Maude." She cut the air with her whip as she spoke, and the great beast jumped up in the

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arm-chair and growled angrily. "Silence, Bosko!" commanded his mistress, and the dog instantly crouched down and sat watching me intently until our morning's work was over.

I had no reason to complain of any want of sympathy from Marie Larisch; she was as ready as the ex-Crown Princess to explain everything that I wanted elucidated, and, although she was infinitely less lovable than Louisa, she possessed a certain kind of rough honesty which made me like her better every day. I am absolutely convinced that Marie Larisch spoke the truth in "My Past"; she was incapable of any flights of imagination, and she told me her story in the level, unemotional way which is associated with ordinary statements about ordinary things.

Marie Larisch appeared to have been brought up with the fixed idea that she must yield implicit obedience to her Aunt Elizabeth. "She was kind to me," she said quietly; "it was our family creed to do exactly as she wished. I never dreamed of doing otherwise. Aunt Cissi always made use of me, and she threw me aside without a regret."

I gathered from her conversation that the Countess and her father, the aged Duke Ludwig of Bavaria, were not on good terms. "Papa has married again *à la main gauche*," she said contemptuously. "His wife has a child of which he believes himself to be the father. Poor, foolish, old Papa!" She spoke of her uncle, the late Duke Carl Theodor, with much affection.

"You are, then, first cousin to the Queen of the Belgians?" I asked, marvelling greatly at the contrast between them.

One day we were talking about the Empress Eliza-

The Countess Larisch

beth and her extraordinary care of her beauty, and the Countess suddenly observed: "Yes, fortunately, Aunt Cissi was spared the knowledge of what happened to her body after she had been embalmed." She then told me a gruesome story about a surreptitious visit which she and her aunt, the late Duchesse d'Alençon, once paid to the vault beneath the Capuchin Church at Vienna, as the Duchesse was most anxious to look upon the features of her beloved sister once again.

The coffins of the Royal dead are padlocked, and the keys are given into the keeping of the Head of the Order, but, by dint of much persuasion, the coffin which contained the body of the Empress was opened. A horrible sight, however, met the eyes of her sister and her niece, as something had gone wrong with the preservative process which had been applied to the body. It had turned a bright blue. "Exactly," said the Countess, "the colour of ultramarine."

"What happened to the Duchesse d'Alençon?" I asked, much interested in the dreadful story.

"She fainted," replied the Countess, "and so did I."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE END OF THE DREAM

I ALWAYS lunched at the Hotel de l'Europe, and before beginning my afternoon work at St. Marcelenstrasse I indulged in a daily drive round the environs of Metz. I invariably engaged the same *kutscher*, a red-faced, untidy-looking individual whom I discovered to be a patriotic Alsatian who detested all things German; and, when he knew that I was thoroughly in sympathy with him, he waxed garrulous over the conquerors of Alsace-Lorraine.

We first became friendly when I fell in with his suggestion that I should inspect some antiques in a street near the cathedral. "The proprietor of the shop is of French nationality," he remarked somewhat defiantly. "So much the better," I told him; and his face brightened. "Then the sympathies of madame are with France?" he ventured. "But naturally," said I; "Germans are not at all to my liking."

"Behold us arrived!" cried the red-faced jehu, who promptly jumped down and accompanied me inside a dirty little shop which was crammed with all kinds of flotsam and jetsam of furniture, engravings, dilapidated china, and baskets of brass fittings and old books. A wizened-looking old man came out of some inner lair, and the *kutscher* introduced me to him as an English lady who detested the Germans.

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“But be seated, madame,” said the old man; “it affords me much pleasure to welcome you,” and he proceeded to show me his odd collection of treasures. I was fortunate enough to secure some pieces of beautiful rose pewter for a mere trifle, and I often looked in during my afternoon drives and hunted for treasures in the haystack of rubbish. The family of the present proprietor had lived in Metz for generations, and the business was once very profitable. “But since the war, madame, the profits have decreased year by year; there is little or no trade, as the Germans don’t encourage tourists to visit Metz. They are suspicious of everybody. It is a city of oppression, and we dare not openly rebel. There are many bitter tears still shed in secret, but the heart of Alsace-Lorraine is loyal to France. These brigands have decreed that our native tongue is to be forgotten—even the babies are expected to lisp their first words in German—but they cannot conquer our souls, and they cannot prevent us from *thinking* in French. I am old, madame, and I well remember the agony of Metz. Will the day ever come when she will throw off her fetters and lift her head once again? I have outlived most of my contemporaries, and I still sit watching and waiting for the dawn.”

“My husband dreams,” said his wife tenderly. “*Tiens, mon ami*, you have quite forgotten the engraving of La Pompadour which you so much wished to show madame. Ah,” she added in an aside, “the poor man! he is inspired at times with the most unhappy sentiments; but I think, with him, that we are on the verge of a great crisis. War is imminent—there is no doubt of it—and when the blow falls, it will fall unexpectedly. Has it not occurred to you since

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you have been in Metz that England is in great disfavour?"

"Well," said I, "there is certainly a lamentable lack of courtesy in the shops and at the hotel."

"It is easily explained," she answered. "You will soon realise that I have spoken the truth."

Her words were brought home to me that very evening. As I stood waiting for my letters a supercilious-looking officer, whom I had noticed as an habitué of the hotel, came up to me and said rudely: "What brings you to Metz, madame?"

"I don't speak German well enough to answer your question," I replied, with an air of indifference.

"That is no answer," he blared; "you understand German well enough."

"And what if I do?" I retorted. "I do not recognise your right to question me." I walked away. He followed me. "Stop, madame," he insisted, this time speaking excellent English. "I may as well tell you not to prolong your visit; we want no English in Metz." This angered me, and I told him that I should remain just as long as ever it suited me. He smiled unpleasantly. "Do not prolong your visit," he repeated as he swaggered away.

I can say with truth that I entirely disliked the officers I saw during my stay at Metz, and this statement is *not* a patriotic outcome of the war. The other day I was shown some letters which I had written to a friend from Metz in January, 1913, and they all reiterate my rooted dislike of the hosts of the "Over Lord." I used to feel positively sick on Sundays when the officers gorged themselves to repletion in the *salle à manger*, and I believe them to have been capable of drinking a brewery dry. Their orgies usually started

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at midday, and lasted until it was time for dinner, when they began another heavy meal. I remember one colonel in particular, who was so fat that he must have lost sight of his feet for years, and his protruding stomach prevented him from getting anywhere near the table. He was not an edifying sight by any manner of means.

I could not, however, help admiring the marvellous military mechanism of Metz. Everything seemed to act by clockwork, and the arrangements for the comfort of its enormous garrison were admirable. It was all perfectly well ordered, and every inch of available space was made use of—nothing was waste in this formidable hive. Even the graves were used over and over again. I remember seeing a gruesome collection of oddments stacked outside the cemetery gates awaiting cartage to the furnace. "They require the ground for the newly dead," said the *kutscher*. "*Voyez-vous*, madame, it is not even permitted to repose oneself long in Metz."

Everything was melancholy, and there seemed to be no escape from the pathetic crosses which encompassed the city. No matter in which direction I drove, I always saw them, and at last I told the *kutscher* that I would rather drive only in the town. "As madame chooses," he said. "But you would like the country in the summer; it is then so different. The graves are hidden in the corn, and the strawberry gardens are wonderful; never are there to be found berries so large or so rich in flavour. But since the war the soil is undoubtedly most fertile," he added reflectively.

Countess Larisch and I worked every afternoon from four until six, and the river fog, which was beginning to rise as I drove to the Marcellenstrasse,

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accentuated the always depressing effect of the city. "It is like a shroud," I said, shivering, as we passed through the eddying vapour, and I was always glad to find myself in the wreath-hung vestibule with which I was now so familiar. The Countess had told me that the wreaths were not funeral tributes, but offerings to the genius of Herr Otto Brück, and I read many of the laudatory inscriptions on the broad satin streamers. "It's a strange notion to keep them," I said; "they are so old and dust-laden." Marie Larisch smiled. "Madame Maude, I am perfectly certain that you do not realise what vain creatures men are. Do you suppose that Otto ever notices the dust or the dates on the ribbons? Certainly not. The wreaths represent the triumphs of yesterday, and whenever he looks at them he imagines himself again in Bavaria, the idol of many hearts. It is a very harmless form of amusement."

"Oh, I'm *sorry*! I spoke thoughtlessly," I cried. "Do forgive me. I suppose I don't really understand what Herr Brück is like."

"I have not asked you to meet him for many reasons," she replied. "Time and trouble have changed him so much that he has become morose. It is a whim of mine not to introduce him." I did not press the subject. By this time I thoroughly understood Marie Larisch and her eccentricities; she was indeed a complex character. The house was literally allowed to go to pieces, the servants seemed absolutely indifferent to their duties, and I don't think the room where we worked was swept for days together.

It seemed so dreadful to see the priceless Meissen figures dust-coated, to notice the uncared-for appearance of the lace curtains and the drooping flowers that

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were never given fresh water. But the smiling, ironic eyes of Elizabeth serenely watched the tragedy of her niece's existence, and the sullen bride surveyed the ruin and wreckage of her later life. I think that Marie Larisch sometimes suffered acutely, for she occasionally looked positively ghastly, and she told me that she could not sleep. It was impossible to pity her; she seemed utterly callous as to her future. "Sometimes I wonder that I still live on," she said bitterly, when I urged her to take courage. Fate had been merciless in its dealings with her, and she had indeed paid dearly for her follies. George Larisch, her eldest son, lay in a suicide's grave, for he shot himself in the cemetery at Naples when he heard the cruel slander which credited him with being the son of the Crown Prince Rudolph; the fair young girl, who might have been such a consolation to her mother, was also dead; and another daughter had vowed herself to a life of charity and good works, far away in South Africa. Countess Larisch was almost as solitary as the ex-Crown Princess, but she possessed none of Louisa's capacity for throwing off trouble.

The temperament of the woman was absolutely stolid, and when I have heard her described as "wicked" I have indignantly repudiated the statement. She has been condemned for having played the go-between in the tragedy of the Crown Prince and Mary Vetsera, but she explained her reason very sensibly when I asked her why she interfered in the matter. "I was always accustomed to obey," she said, "and I obeyed Rudolph in exactly the same manner that I should have obeyed the wishes of Aunt Cissi."

When she described the drama of Meyerling I pointed out the various weak points in the story. "We

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are coming forward with the *truth*," I reminded her; "don't let the papers say that your account is not convincing."

"I cannot say what is not correct," she answered. "What I tell you is what actually happened. I am quite indifferent if I am described as a liar. The newspapers of 1889 were not taken into the confidence of the Imperial Family; the newspapers of 1913 are still more incompetent to criticise the story; their opinions are founded solely on hearsay."

This stubborn adherence to facts impressed me more than anything with the belief that Countess Larisch's version of the tragedy is worthy of credence. It would have been quite easy for her to have foisted some amazing lie upon me, but she never attempted to vary her original statement, and when I asked her to let me see some letters or papers dealing with the subject, she told me quite simply that she had none.

"My mother destroyed all my private papers," she said. "She was terrified of Aunt Cissi, and she lived in dread lest my correspondence should be seized by order of the Empress."

It was a perfectly plausible explanation, and it rang absolutely true. She *had* no private papers, and she explained the reason without the slightest hesitation.

I do not think that Countess Larisch ever cared very deeply for her aunt. The yoke of Elizabeth was heavy, and she was too temperamental for the young girl who became her slave and confidante. Marie Larisch once had an almost animal enjoyment of luxury, and I believe that her life at the Hofburg amply compensated for the worries of her aunt's caprices.

Countess Larisch hates the Emperor of Austria.

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She told me that he really enjoys his pose of a lonely old man bowed beneath the burden of his domestic afflictions. "It is all nonsense, Madame Maude," she said; "he is in reality quite a silly person, and he has always had his beloved Katrina Schratt to make him happy. Francis Joseph is really a *bourgeois* at heart; he is only an Emperor by profession."

"You have never seen the whole of this house," she remarked one day, when we had finished work. "Would you care to do so?" And, as I assented, she took me through the vestibule into a large, lofty bedroom. "This is my husband's room; you won't find anything artistic or interesting here, I can tell you," she remarked bitterly.

There was certainly nothing distinctive about the room. It was untidy, and a few cotillon favours and some tinsel flowers lay on a chair, mixed up with a pile of newly laundered shirts. There were boots and shoes galore; the bed-linen was lavishly trimmed with real lace and embroidered with the cipher and crown, but everything looked tawdry and unhomelike. "I knew you would be disappointed," said the Countess. "Now, this is *my* room—not much better, eh?"

It was *not* much better. Lace-trimmed and embroidered sheets were on the plain, painted bed, the floor was carpetless, a collection of medicine bottles was piled up in one corner, some firewood was drying on the top of a small stove, and a large silver mirror stood on the dressing-table. I thought I had never seen such a melancholy relic of former splendour as this tarnished, neglected mirror set with tiny diamonds, while the inevitable cipher and crown glittered feebly in an expiring effort to pierce the dirt which covered them. Above the bed was the well-known engraving

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of Titania and Bottom. "A present from Aunt Cissi," said the Countess. "She never went anywhere without this picture; she considered it symbolical of herself."

I stood for a moment looking at the uncomfortable room, and I felt a great pity in my heart for this tragic member of a Royal House. I thought of her sweet and gracious cousin, Elizabeth, Queen of the Belgians; I remembered the dignity which invested the life and death of her aunt, the noble Duchesse d'Alençon; I recalled all I had heard concerning the splendid courage of the Queen of Naples; and it seemed impossible that this woman who lived her haunted life apart could be akin to them. The contrast was terrible. I turned to the Countess, who stood looking at me attentively.

"For God's sake, save yourself, leave this dreadful place!" I cried. "It's like a horrible dream. Dear Countess, cut yourself adrift from these awful associations; they are unspeakably degrading."

"Oh, Madame Maude, I told you that you were a 'sensitive,' " she mocked. "I knew you would hate my bedroom. But it's not surprising," she added; "I *hate* the sight of it myself."

The dining-room was another gloomy apartment, and though the beautiful silver and glass reminded me of that which I had seen at Fiesole, there was none of the fine linen so affected by the Princess. The long table here was covered with a piece of marbled American cloth, and the remains of last night's supper had not even been cleared away.

I could hardly believe that anyone could exist in such disorder and discomfort. Surely it was possible to retain some appearance of dignity in uncongenial

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surroundings! It was so painful to witness the ruin of a life which might have been planned on nobler lines, for Marie Larisch was worthy of a better fate, and the brooding horror of her tragic personality became at last a grotesque nightmare peopled with memories of the mad race to which this unfortunate woman belonged. I had witnessed with my own eyes some of the Habsburg eccentricities; now I was faced with the eccentricities of the Wittelbachs, and both poignantly distressed me, because I felt the utmost compassion for the innocent victims of heredity.

My notes were completed by the end of January, and I bade farewell to Countess Larisch, whom I now looked upon in the light of a friend. The day before I left Metz she gave me a silver and mother-of-pearl crucifix which had formerly belonged to the Empress Elizabeth, two finely chased buckles of the period of Maria Theresa, the Prayer Book carried by the Queen of Naples at her wedding (which contained many little holy pictures, and on the reverse side of one was written the word "Sissi"), a white satin bookmark painted by the Empress when she was a little girl, and a gold trefoil charm set with four teeth of the marmot, which she wore to "bite trouble away from the north and the south, the east and the west."

"Before you go, Madame Maude," said the Countess, "I will cut your cards and tell your fortune, as I used to tell Aunt Cissi's every day when we were together at the Hofburg. I believe I'm rather clever at forecasting the future. Here are the selfsame cards," she continued, taking a much-worn pack from a leather case which was lying on the table.

My fortune was not good. "You will have a last year of happiness," said the Countess, "but after that

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there will be many changes and much sorrow." As I rose to take leave of her the undemonstrative woman suddenly became human; she kissed me many times, and told me how much she had appreciated my work and my sympathy. "Bosko also approves of you, Madame Maude," she said. "Come, Bosko, give your foot to madame, and wish her a pleasant journey." The sinister-looking hound extended his huge hind-leg instead of his paw, and I shook it, feeling as if I were now on terms of acquaintance with a "familiar" of the Ducal house.

"Au revoir until we meet in London!" cried Countess Larisch. "Do write an interesting book, Madame Maude."

I left Metz early the next morning, and I had the unpleasant conviction that I was under surveillance from the time I quitted the hotel. I carried my notes and the photographs which had been confiscated in Vienna by order of the Emperor in a leather wallet. I did not, luckily, pack them with my clothes, for when I opened my registered luggage, which had not been inspected by the Customs on the frontier or at Charing Cross, I discovered to my horror that my possessions had been most thoroughly ransacked. My jewel-case, which I had secreted between layers of intimate garments, was forced open, and two valuable diamond rings were missing; but I am quite certain that these were only stolen to lend colour to a fruitless search for the papers which were known to be in my possession, as all the other jewellery was intact.

I was much worried at the loss of my rings, and, with grim humour, I reflected that the advertisement of stolen jewels was quite useless to me. I was not an actress, and I had now discovered that a

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"maker of memoirs" was only supposed to lose her reputation.

I wrote "My Past" in February, 1913, and the book was published in May. Countess Larisch came to London for the day of publication, and once again we had a delightful celebration dinner at the Berkeley. The Countess made me a present of two beautiful brooches, one of which had formerly belonged to King Ludwig of Bavaria; the other was an "M" in diamonds and rubies, surmounted with the Imperial Crown.

"My Past" was a sensational success, but, as we had anticipated, very little credence was placed in Marie Larisch's version of the drama of Meyerling or in her account of the steel casket which Rudolph had entrusted to her care.

Critics are usually broad-minded, and I have always wondered why most of them did not recognise the fact that they were criticising abnormal people, whom it was impossible to judge from the standard of ordinary individuals. Rudolph, Marie Larisch, and the Archduke John were members of unconventional Royal Houses noted for the wildest eccentricities. Why, then, should their doings be contemptuously dismissed as impossible fabrications? *Nothing* is too impossible for these people to attempt when once their minds are made up, and my personal knowledge of the temperaments of Louisa of Saxony and Marie Larisch empowers me to make this somewhat sweeping statement with the utmost confidence.

In that interesting book, "The Recollections of a Royal Governess," the writer rather ridicules the story of the steel casket, and she gives a different version of the drama of Meyerling from those recorded by Countess Landi and Marie Larisch. Her account

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tallies somewhat with that of the ex-Crown Princess of Saxony, but, as the "Royal Governess" did not enter the service of the Imperial Family until some years after the death of the Crown Prince, I cannot quite appreciate the value of her information, especially where the burial of Mary Vetsera is concerned.

It must be remembered that at the time of the tragedy the name of the Countess Larisch was, and is still, inseparably linked with those of Rudolph and the woman he loved. Marie Larisch has always been credited with knowing more about Meyerling than most people, and as Dr. Wiederhofer, who saw both bodies, gave her all the details about Mary Vetsera's burial, I absolutely accept the account given in "My Past."

Countess Larisch told me many intimate details about the condition of Mary Vetsera's corpse—details which could only have been told to her by a medical man, but which are, unfortunately, not of a nature for publication.

There will be endless versions of the tragedy until the end of all time, and I believe that the true one would be discredited if it were even signed by the name of Francis Joseph himself. But these facts are indisputable: (1) Marie Larisch was the confidante of Rudolph and Mary; (2) she took Mary to the Hofburg before the fatal journey to Meyerling; (3) she incurred the deep and lasting displeasure of the Emperor and the Empress Elizabeth on account of the part which she had played in the liaison; and, more conclusive than all, Countess Larisch was a woman at the time of Meyerling, not a young girl like Louisa of Saxony, or a child like Countess Landi. Her rôle was one of

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the actors in the drama, and her information is, therefore, I am convinced, accurate.

Shortly after the Countess returned to Metz she was approached by a mysterious individual who called himself "Meili," and asked if she would consider the purchase of certain documents which threw a new and sinister light on the tragic death of Ludwig II. of Bavaria. Herr Meili also intimated that he possessed secret information which had been divulged to him by the confessor of the late King, and that the secrets of the Confessional and a great deal more sensational material would combine to make a very interesting book. Countess Larisch met Herr Meili in Paris, and in one of her letters to me she described him as a charming, intellectual person, who spent half of the year in Paris and the other half in Rome; not a rich man, but comfortably off, and only willing to sell his secrets at a price!

My friend was convinced that Meili was not an impostor, as his intimate acquaintance with the history of the Bavarian Court conclusively proved that he knew more about the intrigues which surrounded Ludwig II. than did the members of the Royal House. He told Countess Larisch that the death of Ludwig was directly attributable to the machinations of Bismarck, and he even hinted that he possessed the proofs of a darker tragedy. Nothing, however, came of this first meeting, though Herr Meili corresponded at some length with the Countess.

On June 4th, 1913, she wrote :

"DEAR MRS. MAUDE,—I am happy to tell you I received a long letter from Meili this morning, with the list of all his documents, letters and telegrams, with

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the dates. There are about two hundred and fifty, and he asks me to send it back to him. I am having a copy made, which I will send you to-morrow. He is quite willing to have photographs made of the documents which we shall publish in the book. He says it will make such a tremendous sum of money. I am certain that he is not deceiving me in any way.—With best love, your affectionate MARIE.”

. I duly received the long list, and it is still in my possession, with the interesting annotations made by Countess Larisch. But Herr Meili kept on postponing the proposed arrangements as to when and where the Countess and I could meet him and inspect the documents, which, he said, had been removed from Italy and transferred to the bank at Berne. He was very vacillating, and at last we became wearied of waiting for him to arrive at some definite conclusion.

We mapped out a really interesting “Secret History of the Court of Bavaria,” as the Countess wished to incorporate many of her own experiences with those of her eccentric family, and Eveleigh Nash expressed himself anxious to publish the book.

There was (as might have been expected) trouble in Vienna when the German edition of “My Past” appeared, and all copies were immediately suppressed by order of the infuriated Emperor. Herr Brück was also greatly annoyed.

“Oh, dear,” wrote my friend, “I feel so miserable and worried. What do you say?—my husband got furious when he saw the German newspapers and his name mentioned. Do you know what he did? He wrote to Berlin to the *Tageblatt* and said:

“‘My name being mentioned in the note from

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London concerning the drama of Meyerling, I declare to the public that I have nothing to do with the book of my wife. She is the Baroness Wallersee, and the daughter of His Royal Highness the Duke Ludwig of Bavaria, and she can do what she likes. I am not responsible for her, and do not interfere with her affairs.—OTTO BRÜCK.’

“Is not this silly of him? But you can imagine what a nice life I have now. I am staying in my little room all day, with Bosko. The only amusement I have is to read Mr. Enrico Toselli’s memoirs. Even Bosko laughs.”

She was not happy, poor lady, and I fear she did not profit much by her revenge. All the letters which I received from her during this period breathe a passionate longing for escape ; life had evidently become unendurable.

“MY DEAR MRS. MAUDE,—I must write you a long letter to-day. If you are really a true friend to me, as true as I feel for you, you must try and help me. I cannot stand life in Metz much longer, and I do want to run away. Cannot you find some position for me? Is there nobody who would employ the niece of an Empress? It would be the only way to make my father feel ashamed. Since he is divorced from his wife he lives with a little dancer girl about eighteen years old. It is a shame, and he spends all his money with her. I have made up my mind to make some éclat. Do help me. Will you?”

Duke Ludwig of Bavaria is, of course, related to the ferocious duke whose sanguinary proclamations have lately excited so much disgust in England. I don’t know whether Duke Ludwig is equally ferocious,

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but perhaps his idyllic episode of the dancer, which occurred as late as September, 1913, has obliterated his angry passions, and he, therefore, is occupied with *chansons d'amour* instead of the disturbing "Hymn of Hate."

Countess Larisch was greatly excited over the publication of Countess Landi's book, in which she claimed to be the daughter of the Empress Elizabeth. She wrote pages about it, but I fear she disbelieved the story, although, for some deep reason of her own, she half wished it to be true.

"Have you heard anything about that Countess?" she wrote. "I *do* wish that she tells the truth, then *I would be free from the 'serment' (oath?) (is that the expression if you swear to something?)* If I were, I would stand on my head and wave with my legs, so happy would I be."

I always wondered to what "oath" she referred, and I certainly intended to ask her for an explanation, but our plans to meet last year at Baden fell through owing to the outbreak of war between England and Germany.

We shall, no doubt, renew our friendship when these terrible days are over, and we can then collaborate in an up-to-date "Secret History of the Court of Bavaria." In view of recent events, it will be interesting to prove that Ludwig II. did *not* commit suicide, but was murdered, at the instigation of Bismarck, to complete the ascendancy of Germany over Bavaria—at least, so Herr Meili told Countess Larisch was the case.

There was great unpleasantness connected with the French rights of "My Past," which *Le Matin* had agreed to purchase, but at the last moment they

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repudiated their obligations, and it was too late to place the book elsewhere. The breach of contract was settled in our favour when an action was brought against the paper in London, but I have always had my theories about this affair, and I am sure that if Eveleigh Nash had entirely yielded to the wishes of Charles Sauerwein, all would have gone smoothly. I had never forgotten his words: "I do not forgive easily."

I wrote Mr. Frederick Townsend Martin's reminiscences in June, 1913. I have never had anyone to deal with so kind-hearted and good as "Freddy" Martin, a gentleman in the best and truest sense of the word, and I shall always remember him with grateful affection. He was utterly unspoilt, and it was impossible to know him and not to admire his many sterling qualities. His life was singularly devoid of ostentation, his sympathies were boundless, and I never heard him make a disparaging remark about anyone. I am glad that he had his "crowded hour" of success, for "Things I Remember" was very well received, and his delight was a joy to behold.

I spent the month of August in a pretty cottage near Wallingford, where I passed most of my time on the river and dreamed the days away. This was a most peaceful time, and I enjoyed every hour of it. I sometimes think that God occasionally allows us to rest before He imposes terrible trials upon us, and I am often very thankful to recall that drowsy summer and the old thatched cottage half hidden in roses and clematis. It was at Dorchester Abbey Church that I discovered the tragic romance of Sarah Fletcher, about which Jessie Middleton has written in "Another Grey Ghost Book"—a story which has always filled my

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heart with deep pity for the innocent victim of an unscrupulous man.

I came back to Berkeley Cottage in September, when I was approached with the proposal to write a book of reminiscences for the Dowager Maharani of Cooch Behar. I went to see Her Highness at Palace Court, and I found her so sympathetic and charming that I gladly undertook the commission. This was my first experience with Indian Royalty, and it proved highly interesting.

The Dowager Maharani is a most marvellous compound of English ideas adapted by an Indian mind. She is thoroughly in touch with every practical scheme for the enlightenment and welfare of her race, and yet she is essentially Indian, steeped in all the mysticism, traditions and poetry of the East.

When I first made her acquaintance she was mourning the loss of her eldest son, the late Maharajah, and her family hoped that working with me would serve to distract her thoughts in her terrible bereavement. As she gradually grew to know me better the Maharani talked about the "Rajey" of many hopes, and I think that she derived some consolation in telling me about his affection for her. I used to motor down every day to Woldingham, where she had taken a house for a few weeks, and, as the weather was fine, we generally used to work in the garden.

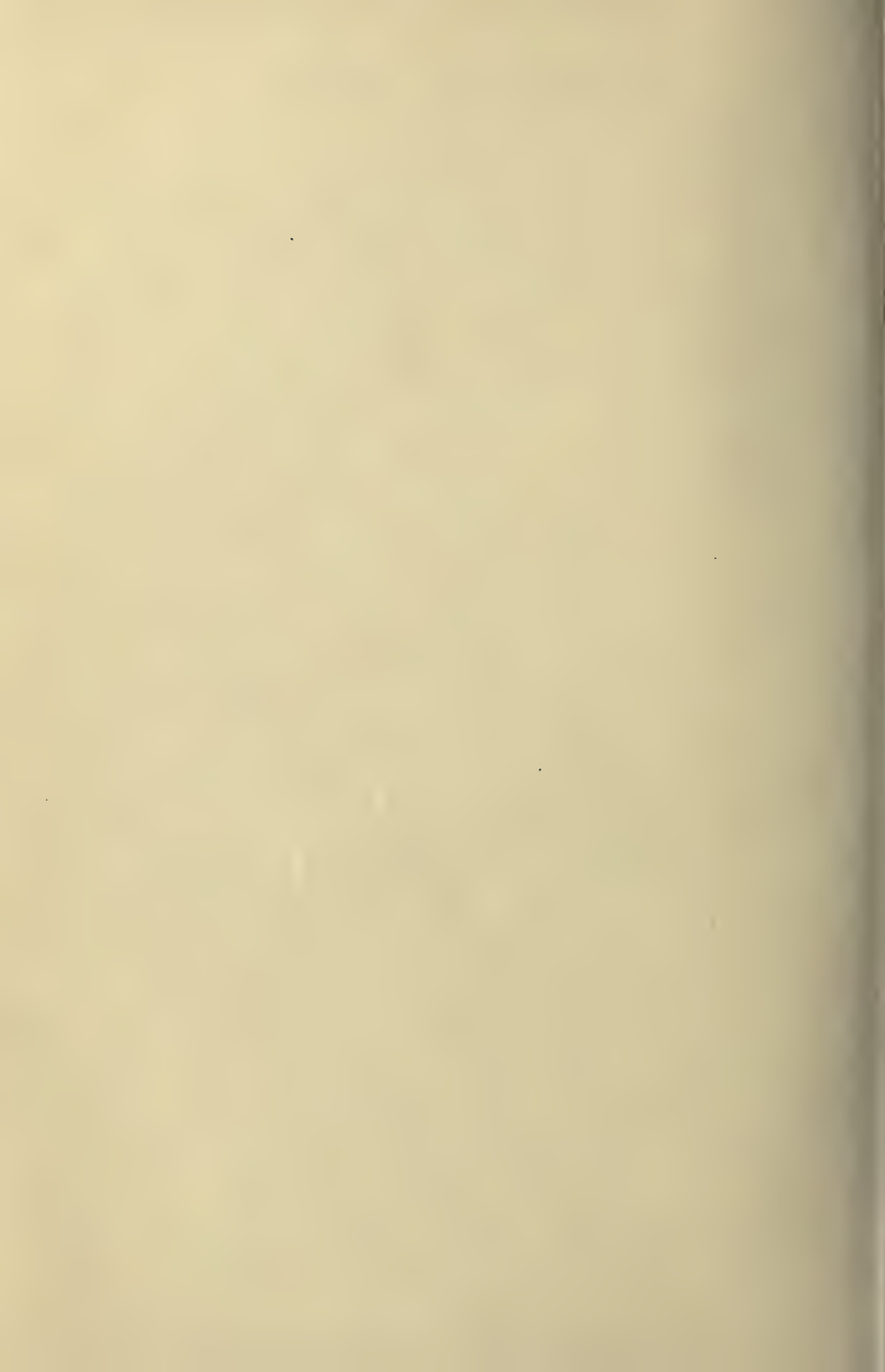
I remember what a picturesque figure the Maharani made as she lay on a sofa wrapped in heavy furs, her head covered with orange-coloured gauze. A brass incense-burner stood on a table beside her, and the "heady" smell of the burning gums perfumed the autumn air. She was like some wonderful figure in an Indian legend, and I was always attracted



Seaman & Pears

Photograph by RITA MARTIN

THE DOWAGER MAHARANI OF COOCH BEHAR,
WITH HER DAUGHTERS



The End of the Dream

by her beautiful, sad eyes. I have never seen their equal.

The Maharani was on terms of great friendship with Queen Alexandra, whom she often went to see at Marlborough House. Her Highness told me what a wonderfully sympathetic nature Queen Alexandra possesses, and I believe that the two widowed mothers experienced a certain melancholy pleasure in discussing their beloved dead. One day the Maharani called at the "Cottage" on her way back from Marlborough House, and her advent caused a small crowd to assemble in Bourdon Street. The Royal "Rolls-Royce" was the very last word in luxury—more like a boudoir than an automobile! The fittings were of gold; it was upholstered in delicate fawn colour, and I don't think that Cinderella's coach could have been more gorgeous. The children returning from school surrounded it, frozen speechless with wonder, and when the Royal lady alighted, I think they were under the impression that an unexpected Coronation Day had occurred.

The Maharani was dressed in white, and wore many rows of magnificent pearls; she was wrapped in ermine, and carried an enormous ermine muff. Such a vision had never before been seen in Jones Street! She fell in love with my quaint little home, and was much interested when I told her that Queen Mary had once stopped a night in the "Cottage" when she was Princess May of Teck.

As the Maharani descended the steep stairs, trailing ermine and lace behind her, an awful fear crept over me lest she should fall, as the staircase at the "Cottage" was never intended for a Royal progress; but, fortunately, nothing happened to the illustrious lady, and I breathed freely once again.

The year had, according to Countess Larisch's

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prophecy, proved happy and prosperous. I had written two successful books, I was engaged on a third, and, when I remembered the disastrous December of 1910, I felt thankful I had never looked back.

I no longer felt the sting of personal criticism. I had outlived much of my resentment against injustice, and I welcomed the New Year of 1914 with a heart free from misgivings.

One morning I awoke with a dreadful sense of impending trouble. There was nothing to account for this. I had no anxiety, but the feeling became intensified, and I knew that my peaceful existence was threatened. An insistent voice urged me to leave the "Cottage," because I was soon to experience the bitterness of death within its walls. But I looked upon this as a passing fancy, for where in the whole of London should I discover another home like the dear little house off Berkeley Square?

I passed many sleepless hours wondering what I had better do, and at last, impelled by a force which I could not resist, I placed Berkeley Cottage on the list of *Houses to Let*. Everybody thought that I must have taken leave of my senses, for the "Cottage" was now associated with my work, and I was unable to give any valid reason for wishing to leave it.

Each hopeless dawn was the prelude to another hopeless day; but it was not until February 28th that I realised the full extent of my misery, when a letter forced the latest tragedy of my existence upon me.

It was then that the desire to escape again gripped me; but not the desire of my youth, to escape from Environment, this time it was escape from Life which I so ardently desired. I felt crushed beneath the

The End of the Dream

Juggernaut car of the world . . . something snapped. I think it was my capacity for suffering.

The idea of self-destruction as a sin troubled me not at all. I considered it no crime to throw myself upon the charity of God. He, at least, would understand the frailties of the woman He had created. In this agony I looked upon the Almighty as a reliable friend, and my trembling soul asked Him for sympathy. "I must die *now*," I said to myself, and I wondered what manner of death would afford me the most speedy release.

As I stood seeking the means to an end, I suddenly remembered that I had brought a box of veronal cachets back from Paris the year before. It represented an unclaimed commission for a friend, and the box was still in my medicine cupboard. As I opened it I inconsequently thought of the day when I had bought the drug at the chemist's in the Place Vendôme—carnival time, and I had a swift mental picture of snow falling, confetti-covered streets, and chilly revellers vainly trying to enact a Bacchanal.

I took a cachet out of the neatly packed row—it looked enormous—most troublesome to swallow, but I knew that I must make the attempt now or never. I was horribly afraid, and I positively shook as I put the cachet on my tongue, and washed it down with some water, which I never even troubled to pour out. I simply drank it straight from the bottle.

The air of the room was close from the after-effects of the gas fire, and the water was almost lukewarm. I had an intolerable feeling of nausea, but I swallowed the second cachet; then, still quivering with fear, I gradually emptied the box until only two remained. As I braced myself for the final draught I discovered

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to my dismay that the supply of water had given out! "Any other morning," I reflected, "there would have been *plenty*." However, I called my maid, and told her to bring me a glass of soda-water. Then I finished what I had set out to do.

I pulled the muslin curtain aside and looked out of the window. It was barely half-past eight . . . a cold February day, with drizzling rain just beginning to fall. "I never have been able to do the right thing," I thought, with clear and morbid self-analysis. "Fancy choosing such a day to die . . . it would have been so much 'happier' if it had been fine!" Then I experienced a pang of mortified vanity—it *was* vanity, so why not avow it? I had taken the veronal before I had dressed my hair, and my straight "fringe" was most undecorative. I should be a failure as a corpse—an ugly, fat woman, with uncurled locks!

I cannot explain this extraordinary mental phase which enabled me to view myself and my actions with such cynical dissection. My appreciation of dramatic effect told me how clumsy I had been in my methods. I hadn't even been tidy; it was a muddle. . . . Escape was all that had mattered in the first mad rush of overwhelming disaster, but I was now able to contemplate the "properties" of the last scene with intolerant disgust. The fatal letter had arrived while I was engaged prosaically in sorting the soiled linen; the floor was strewn with it—and what is more distressingly commonplace than unwashed garments awaiting the laundry?

It was after this that Fear vanished, and Peace pervaded my whole being. . . . I had finished with the emotions of life.

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There was as yet no sign of the stupor which follows an overdose of veronal. I therefore went downstairs and sat in the drawing-room, where I waited until Lizzie, my terrified maid, had fetched Kate, my former servant who had known me so long. It was now, I think, that my brain gave way, for suddenly the room seemed to disappear, and I saw stretches of hot desert sand, and temples outlined against a glowing sky—the Egypt of my subconscious yearnings; but, as I gazed, a mist rose and hid the picture.

I heard Kate asking me what I had done, and I told her I had found life impossible. I remember begging her to impress upon my family that I hadn't really meant to be wicked. "Don't let me be blackened," I kept on repeating. Poor creature, still hidebound by convention, still apprehensive of what people might think!

As I sat, taking like Charles II. a most unconscionable time in dying, someone stood gravely regarding me. It was Dr. Thomson, who had been telephoned to come at once. "What have you done?" he asked. "The only thing possible," I answered. "Come upstairs," he ordered; but I recoiled from the horrors of "washing-day." "It's so untidy," I remonstrated. "Never mind," said my friend. "Do as you are told."

I walked upstairs, and sat on the edge of my bed surveying the linen-strewn floor; in fact, dirty linen was the last unlovely object upon which my eyes rested—another irony in a life of ironic contrasts. Then sleep overcame me, and I remembered nothing more.

I was dangerously ill in the early part of March, and I lay unconscious of all that passed, but my wandering spirit returned to its cage—the time for the final

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great flight was not yet. Dr. Thomson's patience and skill saved me; I was not glad to be alive, but in those days of unconsciousness I was happy. I knew no longer the terror of waking to the chill emptiness of another day, neither the agony of dreaming my sorrow all over again.

Just as I had burned my boats behind me in the days of my troubled girlhood, so I burned them in my later life; but these were fair argosies freighted with many hopes. I had thought that Fate would be kind to me, as I had always poured out libations to her in times of great happiness, and begged her to deal mercifully with one who had suffered much.

It was not to be. I was destined to awake to disillusion, and I passed through dark hours when I rebelled against the mysterious ways of Providence. Alas! I saw my happiness and peace of mind vanish—never to return. I knew that I must face my changed life with fortitude, but I feared the future. For years I had been sheltered and secure; it was all unreal and terrible now, and I often repeated the lines which I thought applied to myself in this time of trouble:

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?

Yes, to the very end.

Will the day's journey take the whole long day?

From morn to night, my friend.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?

Of labour you shall find the sum.

Will there be beds for me and all who seek?

Yes, beds for all who come.

My road *would* wind up-hill until the End; of that I felt sure, for I was one of those doomed to pass through the shadows of adversity to the peace of a diviner day.

The End of the Dream

And, amid the wearying pain, the bitter truth was forced upon me that I could not buckle on the golden armour of Youth, and go forth to fight the world undismayed. As I realised the full extent of my desolation, I dreaded leaving the friendly shelter of the "Cottage," and my tears fell unchecked on the morning of my departure. I sat alone in my bedroom until the maid came to tell me that the taxi was waiting; and when I came down the narrow stairs for the last time I seemed to hear "faint sounds, like the farewell of ghosts." I knew that I should never again know the meaning of "home."

Outside, the April air was chilly, and a watery sun feebly lit up the little street. I paused for a moment to remember many things, and then I gently closed the door for ever on the "Cottage," and on the "images and thoughts that shall not die, and cannot be destroyed."

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